



# WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of  
The National Audubon Society

Volume 59    Number 1    September 1992

---

## Flitty Little Flycatchers

(The Notorious Empidonax)

by Rich Stallcup

In his first *Field Guide to Western Birds*, Roger Tory Peterson paraphrased Ludlow Griscom, the dean of unarmed field ornithology in the U.S., by saying, "Collecting has proven that it is nearly impossible to name many individuals in the field, even in the spring, so the wise field man usually lets most of them go just as Empidonaxes." That was in 1969. Today, there are many people across the country who routinely and correctly identify most individuals, even silent migrants and out-of-range individuals. In fact, there are probably more Empidonax-friendly observers today than there are ones who would risk using the term "field man."

During the 1970s and 1980s a renaissance in field identification of North American birds took place, and although Dr. Peterson's advice was wise at the time and should be used by many today, anyone who wishes to make the effort can tame the notorious Empidonax.

The key to understanding these birds is to know that, in most cases, several characteristics must be noted before identification can be clinched. In descending order of value, such characters are listed here: call note, song, bill size and shape, head-tail proportions, eyering, behavior, winter habitat, and plumage. The reason plumage comes in last is that worn birds and those in fresh feather of the same species may be different colors and have different patterns: such variation can be greater within a single species than between certain pairs of species! Since song, distribution, and nesting habitat are covered elsewhere, they won't be here. Besides, we don't have enough space.

Instead we will try to encapsulate some of the most useful information for the Empidonax species that occur regularly in California. Keith Hansen's excellent illustrations clearly depict some of the subtle differences.

## Geographical Default

Unless it just won't fit, it is best to assume that any individual bird is the expected sort. Even at vagrant traps (where lost birds congregate), the geographically expected choice is nearly always correct over a rare look-alike congener. Since Alder Flycatcher has barely been accepted as occurring in California, call one that looks like a Willow, a Willow. Since Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has been recorded only a few times, call one that looks like a "Western," unidentifiable. (See "Oh, No!" on page 4.) Since Acadian Flycatcher has yet to be found here, consider all the regular large-billed species before embarrassing yourself. Once you are thoroughly familiar with the regulars it is time to tackle the unexpected.

**DIAGNOSTIC SINGLE FEATURES.** Though in most cases a combination of several characteristics will have to be compiled to make an identification, there are a few single-feature traits by which a bird may be named. Tail movement, a trait common to all Empidonax, is always a variation on an upward flick, except in

the *Gray Flycatcher* whose tail motion is down or forward. Also, the tail of Gray appears less rigid than the others' tails, flopping in the breeze as though it might blow off. Any Empidonax in the far West with a *yellow throat* may quite safely be called a "Western" Flycatcher; one with an obscure or *missing eyering* should be a *Willow Flycatcher*. The call notes of Western and Hammond's are theirs alone.

**HABITAT PREFERENCES.** Migrants and wintering birds (usually in Mexico) show habitat preferences as do breeders (not addressed here). Where these habitats are available, Westerns and Hammond's like thick woodlots over dry ground; Willows and Least's like open areas bordering woods or damp marshy areas; Duskie's and Grays like dry open shrubland. Obviously, migrants that need to plop down for refueling may have to settle for less than optimum places.

## Brief Summaries

The following thoughts concern flycatchers in fairly fresh plumage

(most birds usually are), because adults before autumn molt may be ratted-out and colorless. For all individuals, features other than feathers—including voice—are more useful for identification.

"WESTERN" FLYCATCHER is usually an easy call, with its yellow throat, broadly yellow underparts, green back, bold almond-shaped eyering, and large spade-like bill that is mostly orange ventrally. It is very active, often jerking up the tail, usually in concert with staccato wing flicks; the wings seem to shiver back to closed position. Legs and feet of Western Flycatchers are gray, especially in young birds. Legs and feet of the other species are black. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher of the East is the most similar; if the wings are strikingly black, begin considering that. In fall, some "Westerns" appear very brown. (See "Oh, No!" on page 4.)

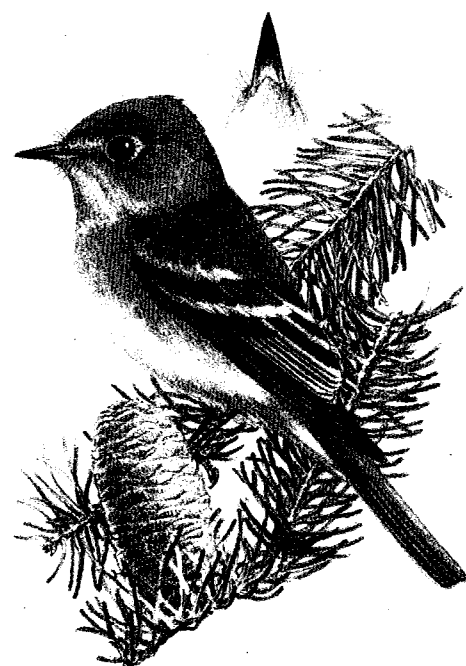
WILLOW FLYCATCHER, too, is an easy call for you, following some experience with the group. Due to its size, shape, bill size, and lack of eyering, it might be mistaken more often for a pewee than for another Empidonax. Compared to Western Wood-Pewee, however, it is



Western Flycatcher on coast redwood  
(with the bird's lower mandible shown in back).



Willow Flycatcher on willow



Hammond's Flycatcher on white fir

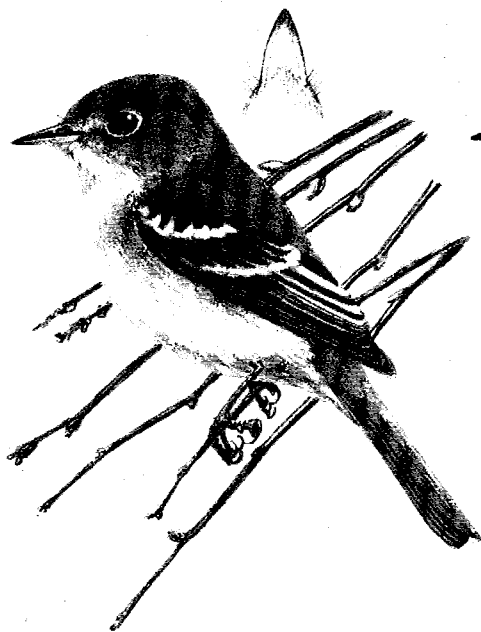
browner—(less gray—) backed, lacks the sooty breast or 'unbuttoned vest', has a mostly orange lower mandible (at least half-black in Western Wood-Pewee), and has a round, less peaked crown. Willow Flycatchers flick their tails and wings like other Empidonax; Wood-Pewees do not. Primary projection—how far the longest feathers of the folded wing reach down the tail—is longer for pewees. The call note of Willow Flycatcher is a "whit" or "pwit," rather like several other Empidonax but louder and more emphatic. Western Wood-Pewee gives a wheezy descending, "pseeer." The brown tail of Willow Flycatcher is wide compared to most other Empidonax, especially at its junction with the body.

GRAY FLYCATCHER has the downward tail stroke that is absolutely diagnostic and identifies the species. It is also the longest-tailed of the group, and the narrow outer web of its outer tail feather is distinctly white. Dusky Flycatcher is the main look-alike, since both have rather small rounded heads, long narrow bills (in these two and Hammond's Flycatcher the bill is less

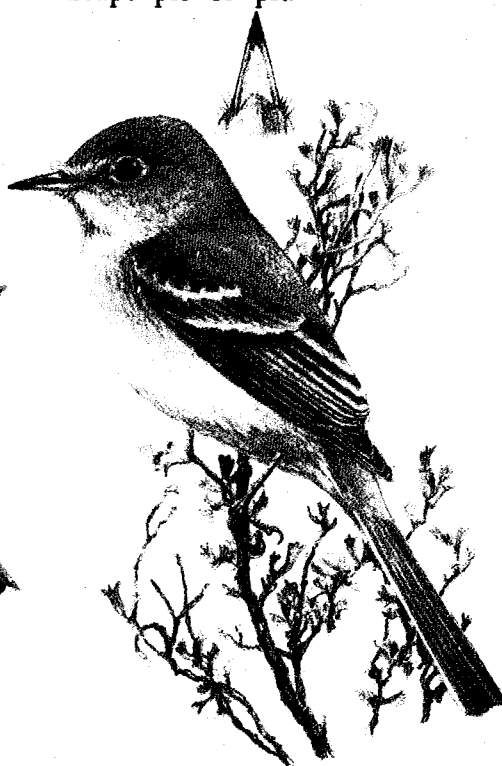
than  $5/8$  as wide as it is long), are relatively pale in plumage (though Gray is usually more so), and both have long tails. Both also have rather quiet "whit" call notes that, to most ears, are indistinguishable. Go for the tail.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER is very similar to Gray in shape (small head, long tail), bill shape, and call note. In plumage, it more resembles Hammond's (a larger-headed, shorter-tailed bird); Dusky's bill is narrow like Hammond's but longer. Its white eyering is narrow and round like Hammond's, but the lores are also pale, giving Dusky a more spectacled look. Dusky's outer tail feathers have whitish outer webs, closer to the white in Gray Flycatcher than the tan in Hammond's. Behavior during migration and on the winter range for Dusky is generally more complacent—only occasional tail lifts and very little wing-flicking. They sit still a lot. During breeding season, both species are very twitchy. While the call note of Dusky is a soft "whit" like Gray, Least, and Willow flycatchers, that of Hammond's is an abrupt "pic" or "pit."

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER is most similar to Dusky in plumage but closer to Least Flycatcher (very rare in California) in size, shape, and bill size. These two are very small birds with small-looking bills (Hammond's bill looks tiny, and the whole bird is reminiscent of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet) and a large-headed, short-tailed look. Hammond's have more colorful green and yellow body plumage than Least. The inner secondaries and tertials of Least, unlike Hammond's, are very dark and broadly edged with white or yellow. (Alan Phillips has pointed to this last feature as generally more typical of eastern species of Empidonax than western ones.) Again, Hammond's call is a sharp "pic" or "pit," very unlike the soft 'Audubon's Warbler'-like "chit" or "whit" call from Least and several other Empidonax. Hammond's primary projection is clearly greater than that of Least and may be the best single field mark between the two.



*Least Flycatcher on twig*



*Gray Flycatcher on sagebrush*



*Dusky Flycatcher on manzanita*

Drawings by Keith Hansen

## Oh, No!

Now that we all know how to identify all five species of western Empidonax (ahem), can it get worse? You bet your Bushnells it can. Through use of electrophoresis to analyze variation in proteins, Dr. Ned Johnson, with Jill A. Marten (*Auk* 105:177-191, 1988), has conclusively (?) demonstrated that there are actually two species of "Western Flycatchers:" Pacific Slope Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*) and Cordilleran Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis*). Results of the work show that, where nesting is sym-

patric, the coastal form does not entirely blend with the interior form. Although their songs are subtly, but noticeably, different (in some places), their call notes are more similar—and the birds *look* more alike—than any other species pair, even the Willow and Alder complex. We're still not sure how to identify silent out-of-range individuals (or maybe even noisy ones), even in the hand. Much study of these two forms has been accomplished in the field in the last four years, and there still is no way to tell them apart by sight or, in large parts

of their breeding range, even by voice! It appears the wise field person will let most of them go just as "Westerns."

**SUMMARY.** The best way to learn how to separate these little "Gnat Kings" is to let someone who is familiar with them lead you through their lairs in the field. Next best is to find one for yourself, look and listen carefully, and if, with all your information, it is still perplexing, take the advice of the masters and "... let most of them go just as Empidonaxes." Admire their strong delicacy and wish them well. 🐦

	"Western"	Willow	Gray	Dusky	Hammond's	Least
<b>Call note</b>	very high "it si" or "sit"	loud "whit" or "pwit"	quiet "whit"	quiet "whit"	sharp "pic" like Pygmy Nuthatch	quiet "chit" like "Audubon's" Warbler
<b>Bill size</b>	large wide	large wide	long narrow	medium narrow	short narrow	short wide
<b>Overall shape</b>	large head, short tail, big bird	large head, medium tail, big bird	small head, very long tail, big bird	small head, rather long tail, medium bird	large head, rather short tail, small bird	large head, rather short tail, small bird
<b>Eyering</b>	bold, buffy, almond-shaped	mostly absent, like peewees'	narrow, white, round, stands alone	narrow, white, round, light lores	narrow, white, round, stands alone	bold, white, slightly almond-shaped
<b>Tail movements</b>	often and abrupt: up	occasional and abrupt: up	occasional and floppy: down	seldom and casual: up	often and abrupt: up	often and abrupt: up
<b>Wing movements</b>	often: flits and shivers	occasional: flits and shivers	seldom and casual	seldom but snappy	frequent and snappy	seldom but snappy
<b>Ventral bill color</b>	90% orange, dark tip	90% orange, dark tip	80% pink or orange, dark tip	50-50% orange and indistinct black	50-50% orange and indistinct black	80% orange, black tip smudgy
<b>Primary extension</b>	short	shortish	shortish	medium	long	short
<b>Crown contour</b>	bushy-crowned	rather flat	round	round	rather round, slightly spiky at rear	rather round, slightly spiky at rear
<b>Throat color</b>	yellow	white	white	grayish	gray	white
<b>Breast</b>	dark green wash over yellow	washed light olive-brown	slight grayish or pale green wash	light olive-gray wash; paler than Hammond's	olive-gray; often looks darker than Dusky; 'open-vested'	variable grayish over white
<b>Back color</b>	fresh green or worn brown	warm brown, occasional olive	pale gray or (juveniles) gray-olive	grayish olive to grayish	olive (fall), grayish (spring)	brownish olive to grayish
<b>Crown color</b>	green	brown	uniform pale gray	uniform medium gray	uniform darkish gray	uniform darkish gray-brown, dark feather centers
<b>Outer web of outer tail feather</b>	tannish, light	tannish, light	white	grayish white	tannish, light	tannish, light

*This chart should be used with caution; it refers only to birds away from nesting areas, where behavior and call note are important, and to those in fresh plumage. Even so, plumage characteristics are variable within each species. Here the more helpful, non-feather features are given first.*

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, the

artist, Keith Hansen and the editor, Claire Peasley. Rich Stallcup's identification articles appear regularly in the Observer. 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.

# Lens View

by Herb Clarke

This is a continuation of my discussion about accessories I have found to make bird and nature photography easier when under pressure in the field.

A vexing problem, continually encountered, is securely attaching a camera or lens to another device such as a tripod. The conventional way is to thread a 1/4-20 tripod screw into a hole in the bottom of a camera or lens. This is extremely awkward and slow and there is always the danger of cameras or lenses, especially heavy or long ones, twisting loose. This arrangement is old and poorly designed but is standard throughout the industry. We are saddled with it permanently because manufacturers cannot agree on a good universal solution. On all my large lenses and even telescopes, I employ a device called a quick release which consists of two parts, one attached to the lens' tripod socket and the other to the screw of a tripod or shoulder brace. This method allows quick positive assembly and release. One drawback is that a small threaded hole must be drilled through the lens release portion into the lens base plate so that both pieces can be screwed together to prevent loosening and twisting. The type I recommend, TRI-LOCK, sells for about \$40, and may be hard to find at the average camera store. There are a number of other kinds available, with other advantages and disadvantages, ranging in price to well over \$100 a set.

Oftentimes, photographing out of a car window is advantageous but in doing so, it is difficult to hold the camera and lens steady. There are window

mounts available, but I have found that they don't usually allow enough flexibility to quickly shift camera position. The solution is to use a bean bag. Here again commercial ones can be purchased, but a simple effective one can easily be made. Sew soft heavy duty cloth into a bag about a foot square. Fill it with sand or dried beans but not too full. To keep the filling from shifting, sew some lines across and through the bag. Drape the bag over a partially raised car window and you have a steady but flexible support which also



protects the glass and lens from scratching. A bean bag also works well on flat surfaces such as car roofs or hoods.

I have discussed electronic flash units in several columns because to me, flash is indispensable in nature photography. A problem frequently encountered is that after the flash fires, the bird immediately assumes a much better position but then you have to wait five seconds or more for the flash to recycle to full charge. This does not sound like very long but by then, the bird has likely flown away. Many brands offer auxil-

iary battery packs that allow the flash to quickly recycle, most at a minimum of about five seconds. This is still not good enough. Some brands make use of a 510 volt battery and when using a fresh battery, results in recycling time as fast as one second. These batteries will give hundreds of recycles with gradually lengthening times. I discard them when the time required is more than five seconds. For light duty use, a nickel cadmium 510 volt rechargeable battery can be substituted. If you take a lot of photos, as I do, this method becomes quite expensive as both these batteries cost about \$60 each plus the one-time cost of the accessory battery pack. The improved results are well worth the trouble and expense if you are really serious about nature photography. A flash model that meets all requirements, including excellent light output, is the Sunpack 433D.

Another useful accessory is a monopod. This is a one-legged version of a tripod. If you are scrambling over uneven ground such as rocks or tundra and you spot a target within range, much time is lost in setting up a tripod if it's possible to do so at all. Also, in crowded conditions where there is insufficient room to spread three legs, a monopod may be the only way to steady your camera. But remember, monopods are not universal substitutes for good tripods. There are a number of brands available suitable for this limited purpose.

I want to emphasize an important point. There is no correct or incorrect way to take photographs. Each photographer should decide what kind of picture appeals to him, no matter what rules are enunciated. But he should keep an open mind and not be afraid to try new techniques. Suggestions in these columns are reflections of my changing opinions over the years. 🐦

# Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

When our environmental President is asked about his achievements as protector of our human habitat, he invariably mentions the Clean Air Act. To his credit, he did sign the Act in 1990. The Act establishes regulations that control producers of substances and practices that injure us and the natural world.

That same year he appointed the Council on Competitiveness, a cabinet-level panel of six permanent members whose job it is to review regulations that might not appeal to business and industry. The Council is headed by Vice-President Dan Quayle and originally included former Chief of Staff John Sununu. Most of the work is done by a small staff that acts as a sympathetic nanny to many leaders of enterprise and their lobbyists. Critics label the Council as secretive, "a shadow government for special interests," with no public accountability. It has refused to appear before congressional committees to answer questions about its operations.

It was not long before the presence of this elite, undercover agency was felt in the land. When Administrator William K. Reilly submitted the EPA's plan for air pollution controls to the White House in late 1991, the Council sent it back with over 100 weakening changes. Now the Clean Air Act requires a polluting firm to apply for a new permit if it decides to increase its emissions beyond the level allowed by its existing permit. A public review must be held before a new permit can be issued. The Council proceeded to rewrite the rules so that polluters could get permits for any amount of emissions without public oversight. Busi-

ness was being deprived of "operational flexibility," they said. Bill Reilly was reported to be very angry at this interference with the permit process and was ready to do battle. One Administration official said, "Until now, Reilly has always regarded the Council on Competitiveness as a minor irritant, but now they are on a collision course."

We move forward to April 1992. President Bush approved the new permit process and Reilly, still at the helm of EPA, lost another confrontation.

Will Reilly ever win one? He came to Washington with a fine record as director of the World Wildlife Fund. Conservationists applauded. He seems to be an honest man trying to do the right thing. Yet he has been continually thwarted and demeaned by administration stalwarts. His treatment by Mr. Bush at the Rio Summit before the entire world was an acute embarrassment for the United States. Does he hang on because if he quits, he might be replaced by a James Watt clone?

Environmentalists were aghast at the President's decree on permits. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif), who sponsored the Act, said, through a spokesman, "The Administration has shown utter disregard to the mandates of the law, and the ramifications go far beyond the Clean Air Act." Waxman's committee, the House Health and Environment Sub-committee, is suing the EPA for full compliance with the Act. The cavalier attitude of a "law and order" executive branch toward the laws of the land has indeed "ramified" beyond the Clean Air Act. The assault on the Clean Water Act is a case in point.

There was a great confrontation last

year when the Administration proposed changes in the Wetlands Delineation Manual, a technical code that defines wetlands. Suggested new definitions would eliminate thousands of pothole ponds, seasonal streams and marshes that provide habitat for wildlife. Even large portions of the Everglades would become non-wetlands. As much as 50% of our remaining wetlands would vanish and become vulnerable to oil, mining and real estate development. This semantic sleight-of-hand was (you guessed it) the work of our Council on Competitiveness and exposed the hollowness of Mr. Bush's campaign slogan, "No net loss of wetlands." The hue and cry of scientists and environmentalists forced the manual changes into a limbo where they have hovered for some time. At this writing (mid-July), there is some encouraging news. The chair of the EPA Appropriations Subcommittee is including money for a National Academy of Sciences study of wetlands delineation in this year's EPA funding bill. This will take the manual revision process out of the hands of politicians and put it into the hands of scientists—where it belongs.

Those of us who are concerned about the fate of our natural resources are simply horrified by the blatant disregard of this present government for the environment. At every turn, the interests of the Administration's rich and powerful friends come before the interests of the rest of us. National Audubon's Brock Evans has said, "The recent actions of the [Bush] Administration are no better than the record of James Watt and Ronald Reagan, who

were to the environment what Godzilla was to Tokyo."

Another flicker of hope on the horizon: a bill may be introduced into the House that would torpedo the Council on Competitiveness. At the moment, details are not available, but it may involve cutting off the Council's funding. The Council, which up to now has been operating without publicity, is beginning to get quite a bit. Perhaps the public will catch on that this small group of willful men is unilaterally and unconstitutionally giving away the store and will ask for its demise. If that bright day arrives, it will be clear that the Clean Air Act was a fine PR ploy by a cynical government that set about in short order to sabotage it. Henry Waxman says, "... a re-writing of the law doesn't say much about respect for the democratic process." ➤

## Bookstore Volunteers Needed

**V**olunteers are needed for any day, Tuesday through Saturday, to help maintain the well-known super service to our membership and customers worldwide. No experience is necessary. We need people to prepare shipments and greet customers.

Interested retirees or anyone looking for an exciting activity once or twice a week working with nice people in a pleasant atmosphere should give Olga or Brenda a call at Audubon House at (213) 867-0202.

Here's a good opportunity to learn about the newest books, binoculars and telescopes while expanding your appreciation of the world of nature. ➤

# Bookstore News

by Olga Clarke

## Out of Print and Collector's Books Update

*African Handbook of Birds*, Mackworth, Praed & Grant (A Complete Set), Series I, Series II, Series III  
*Birds of Asia*, Gould  
*Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia*, King  
*Audubon's America*, Peattie  
*Birds of America*, Audubon  
*Handbook of North American Birds* (complete set), Palmer  
*The Birds of the Balearics*, Bannerman  
*Birds of Burma*, Smythies  
*Birdwing Butterflies of the World*, D'Abrera  
*Birds of Chile* (2 vol. set w/ supplement), Johnson  
*Collins Field Guide to the Birds of Galapagos*, Michael Harris  
*Collins Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa*, Williams & Arlott  
*Collins Field Guide to the National Parks of East Africa*, Williams  
*Collins Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa*, Serle, Morel & Hartwig  
*California Condor*, Koford  
*Condor Journal*, Smith  
*25 Birding Areas in Connecticut*, Proctor  
*Curassows and Related Birds*, Delacour  
*Estrildid Finches of the World*, Goodwin  
*Birds of Europe*, Gould  
*Hérons of the World*, Hancock & Elliot  
*Birds of Idaho*, Burleigh  
*Birds of Lebanon and the Jordan Area*, Benson  
*A Guide to Bird Watching in Mallorca*, Watkinson  
*Rare Mammals of the World*, Burton & Pearson  
*Birds of Malawi*, Benson & Benson

*New Guide to Birds of Malta*, Sultana  
*Birds of the Ocean*, Alexander  
*Oceanic Birds of South America* (2 vol. set), Murphy  
*Birding in Ohio*, Thomson  
*Owls of the Northern Hemisphere*, Voous  
*Finding Birds in Panama* (incl. supplement), Edwards  
*Birds of Paradise and Bowerbirds*, Cooper & Forshaw  
*The Pheasants of the World*, Johnsgard  
*Rails of the World*, Lansdowne & Ripley  
*Birds of Seychelles and the Outlying Islands*, Penny  
*Birds from Siam and the Malay Peninsula*, Riley  
*Guide to Birds of South America*, de Schauensee (Original)  
*Bird Watching in Southern Spain*, Paterson  
*Oiseaux de Tahiti*, Thibault & Rives  
*The Mew Guide to the Birds of Taiwan*, Severinghaus  
*Bird Guide of Thailand*, Lekagul & Cronin (1st Edition)  
*Wildfowl of the World*, Soothill & Whitehead  
*Words for Birds*, Gruson  
*World Wildlife Guide*, Macdonald  
*Birds of the Highveld*, Ginn

⌘ ⌘ ⌘

All of the Los Angeles Audubon Society Bookstore's collector's books are in fine or near fine condition. Terms are net 30 days.

Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. ➤

# Birds Of The Season

by Hank Brodtkin

**W**ith the echoes of a vagrant-filled spring migration still in our heads, we are already into the fall migration. By late August, early "vagrants" such as Eastern Kingbirds, Red-eyed Vireos, and American Redstarts, will start showing up with the rarer specialties appearing after mid-September. Coastal promontories, canyons and parks, as well as natural and man-made desert oases, are among the better places to observe landbird migration and to hunt up an elusive vagrant. Coastal lagoons and the few desert wet spots will attract hundreds of shorebirds in various plumages to test identification skills, and pelagic trips will comb our coastal waters hoping for the odd and unusual long distance wanderer. So by any means find time to get out in this most challenging of seasons—and please keep us apprised of your findings.

Rare land birds kept showing up in our area well into June, capping the most phenomenal spring migration ever. Reports from the middle of June until this writing (July 26) indicate great numbers of usually pelagic species seen from or near shore including Pink-footed, Sooty, and Black-vented Shearwaters, Leach's, Ashy, Black and Least Storm-Petrels, Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, Pomarine Jaegers, and a scattering of alcids including Common Murres, Xantus' and Craveri's Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets and Sabine's Gulls as well as much greater than usual numbers of Brown Pelicans. These reports come from Balboa to Pt. Mugu and may well



*Little Stint, adult in worn alternate plumage, Irvine (Orange County), 27 July 1992  
Both photos by Jonathan K. Alderfer*

be the result of the El Niño effect (Brian Daniels, Mitch Heindel and Don Desjardin). Of course this all has its down side—sea birds are showing up emaciated, and nesting attempts are failing or non-existent among Black-vented Shearwaters and Brown Pelicans. Usually this is part of a natural cycle built into the breeding biology of sea birds, and they will recover if human activities have not stressed their environment too much.

Fifty Western and six Clark's Grebes seem to be summering at Terminal Island—a much higher number than usual (MH). A Red-billed Tropicbird has been seen off Palos Verdes off and on since 5 July (MH), and an unprecedented two Masked Boobies have shown up, one at Pt. Mugu on 20 June (DD) and one at Balboa Pier on 30 June (BD and Doug Willick).

Magnificent Frigatebird reports include single birds from L. A. Harbor on 10 July (MH), one from Balboa Pier on 14 July (BD) and another from the pier on 16 July (Steve Mlodinow). A Little Blue Heron was at Hansen Dam Park on 5 July (Dustin Alcalá), and a few Least Bitterns are apparently breeding at Harbor Lake (MH). Black

Brant remained at Malibu Lagoon until 24 June (Dave Koeppel), and two reports of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks come from the Salton Sea—one from the south end on 6 July (Monte Taylor) and one from the north end on 10 July (Norm Hogg). Late Black Scoters include one from Pt. Mugu on 14 June (DD) and one from Pt. Fermin on 11 July (MH). A late Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen at Harbor Park on 15 July (MH), and a Mississippi Kite was at the Kern Reserve on 5 June (Bob Barnes) with another in Norwalk on 1 July (John Schmitt).

Four pair of American Avocets with young were found near the mouth of the L.A. River on 11 July (MH), and two Solitary Sandpipers showed up at Hansen Dam on 13 July (DA). A very rare Little Stint, in alternate plumage, delighted many observers at the San Joaquin Marsh ponds on 25 July. It was joined by a Stilt Sandpiper (DW).

A South Polar Skua was off Pt. Mugu on 7 June (DD) and another was seen off Newport on 12 July (Jeff Boyd). Five first year Sabine's Gulls were spotted from Pt. Fermin on 14 June and two were seen from Balboa Pier on 22 July (BD). Five late Common Terns were at Bolsa Chica on 27 June (SM), and a Pigeon Guillemot was seen off Balboa on 14 July (BD) and off Pt. Vicente on 18 July (Barney Schlinger). Two Chimney Swifts were at Hansen Dam on 4 June (DA) and one was in Redondo Beach on 19 June (MH). A Nuttall's Woodpecker was at Harbor Park—very unusual at this location—on 15 July (MH), and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was on Mulholland



Highway in the Santa Monica Mountains on 28 June (Dennis Heinemann). A **White-eyed Vireo** was along Arrastre Creek in the eastern San Bernardino Mountains on 25 June (Bob Munoz) and another was along San Juan Creek, Orange County, on 26 June (BD). A **Yellow-throated Vireo** singing at Descanso Gardens on 9 June (Gayle Benton) was present into July, and a **Red-eyed** was vocalizing in Hansen Dam Park on 2 July (DA). **Northern Parulas** continued their spring invasion with a bird at Huntington Beach Central Park on 6 June (BD), another at Descanso Gardens on 11 June (GB) and a third at Newcomb Ranch in the San Gabriels on 16 June (David Schock). A singing **Magnolia Warbler** was found at Madrona Marsh on 25 June (Martin Byhower), an **American Redstart** was in West Los Angeles on 11 June (Bill

Adams) and a **Worm-eating Warbler** was reported from Butterbrecht Springs, Kern County, on 14 June (BB and Elton Morrel). A singing **Kentucky Warbler** was at Newcomb Ranch on 16 June (DS), and a **Hooded Warbler** was found



*Yellow-throated Vireo, Wilderness Park, Redondo Beach, 10 May 1992*

at the El Dorado Nature Center on 31 May (Laurie Conrad). A female **Hooded** joined the males at Descanso Gardens on 6 June (Art and Jan Cupples) where breeding was appar-

ently attempted (GB).

A singing **Hepatic Tanager** was in San Francisquito Canyon on 7 June (DK), a female **Summer Tanager** was at Hansen Dam on 4 June (DA) and another was at Sycamore Flat Campground near Valyermo on 11 July (Kimball Garrett). An **Indigo Bunting** was on Big Rock Creek on 11 July (KG). A male **Baltimore Oriole** was singing and interacting with female **Bullock's Orioles** in Wheeler Gorge north of Ojai.

Good Birding! 🐦

Records of rare and unusual bird sightings reported in this column should be considered tentative pending review by the *American Birds* regional editors or, if appropriate, by the *California Bird Records Committee*. Send your bird observations with as many details as possible to:

**Hank Brodtkin** OR **David Koeppel**  
27-1/2 Mast Street (310) 454-2576  
Marina del Rey, CA 90292  
(310) 827-0407

## Exciting Volunteer Opportunity

**T**he National Audubon Society's Education Division is seeking volunteers to assist with the Ballona Wetlands Education Program. Beginning in September, docents will participate in an exciting educational training program that will focus on wetlands ecology and leadership skills in preparation for leading groups of elementary school children in outdoor classroom experiences. Energy, enthusiasm and a love of children and nature are the only prerequisites. A commitment of approximately 3-4 hours per week is needed. Information: Dan Kahane (310) 574-2799. 🐦

## Wanted: Burrowing Owls

**S**alton Sea National Wildlife Refuge is requesting your help in locating Burrowing Owls wearing colored leg bands. A study was initiated in 1992 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine Burrowing Owl post-fledging dispersal, pair and nest site fidelity, migration routes, wintering areas, and other information. Each owl was banded with a unique combination of one to three colored (red, yellow, blue, green and/or white) leg bands and one aluminum USFWS leg band, and may be wearing a total of two to four bands on one or both legs.

If you observe a color-banded Burrowing Owl, the following information would be greatly appreciated:

- 🐦 Date and time of observation
- 🐦 Location of observation
- 🐦 Colors and position (top or bottom) of color bands on each of the bird's right or left leg
- 🐦 The bird's behavior
- 🐦 Any additional comments you may consider important
- 🐦 Observer's name, address and phone number

We will inform you of the bird's origin, age and any other information, so please report your sightings to:

Salton Sea NWR; P.O. Box 120; Calipatria, CA 92233-0120  
(619) 348-5278

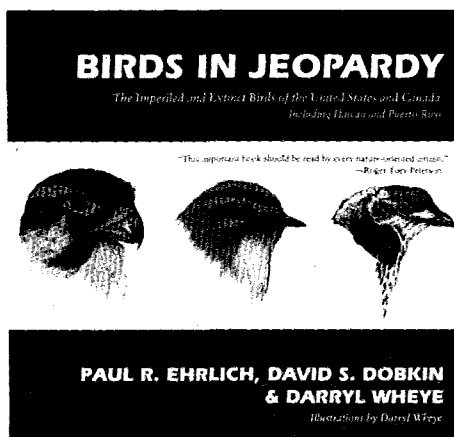
## A Book Review

by Hank Brodtkin

*Birds in Jeopardy: The Imperiled and Extinct Birds of the United States and Canada, Including Hawaii and Puerto Rico*—Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye. 1992. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press. x + 259 pp/\$17.95 paper, \$45.00 cloth (available at the LAAS Bookstore).

Most of us who have been birding for some time have noticed a definite reduction in the number of birds. A good example is the Olive-sided Flycatcher. Once its whistled call was one of the most common sounds in our local mountains. Indeed the hiker in the coniferous forest was never out of earshot of at least one of these conspicuous birds. In recent years, our trips to Mt. Pinos have produced only one and sometimes no individuals of this species. Many articles and at least one book, John Terborgh's *Where Have All the Birds Gone* (1989, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey), have been written on the dwindling population of birds in North America. While the Ehrlich-Dobkin-Wheye team were working on *The Birder's Handbook* (1988, Simon and Schuster, New York)—a really neat book, by the way—the idea to create this volume was born.

Paul Ehrlich is of course no stranger to the subject of the shrinking biological diversity of our planet. Indeed his works, with his wife Anne, on the effects of the exploding population of Earth such as *The Population Bomb*, *Extinction* and, more recently, *The Population Explosion*, have drawn thousands of people into the conservation movement over the past 20 years. He also has a regular column in *American Birds*. He



is a Bing Professor of Population Studies and Professor of Biology at Stanford University and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. David Dobkin is a zoologist from Rutgers University, specializing in the ornithology and ecology of North America and the Caribbean. Darryl Wheye is a biologist, writer and artist—whose head portraits of each taxon treated grace this volume.

*Birds in Jeopardy* covers the North American continent north of the Mexican border, including Canada, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, and deals with both species and subspecies.

Each taxon discussed includes paragraphs on nesting, food, range, winter range, where it is in peril, reasons it is jeopardized, a history of its listing—from Blue-listed through Endangered—and, if not extinct, recovery plans.

This book is broken down into color coded sections preceded by a thorough discussion of terms used, types of listing by political and conservation organizations and shades of endangerment. The first section treats *Birds That Are Officially Threatened or Endangered* and are so designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. This section is broken down into continental, Ha-

waiian and Puerto Rican forms, and ends with a list of candidates for federal listing as of 1990.

The next section is titled *Birds That Are Not Officially Listed in the U.S.* Species and subspecies in this section include birds protected by the government and not listed, birds that are not listed because of various (usually stupid) reasons, birds on the National Audubon Society Blue List (a list which attempts to spotlight forms that may be in trouble either throughout their range or in portions thereof), birds not quite as bad off as the above but that should be closely monitored called Birds Of Special Concern, and lastly a group designated as Birds Of Local Concern which contain forms which seem to be just beginning to show population depression and which immediate local action might prevent serious damage.

Finally is a group of the nine extinct (since 1776) continental forms, the 23 extinct Hawaiian forms and the extinct Culebran Puerto Rican Parrot.

After these species and subspecies discussions are several essays, reprinted from *The Birdwatcher's Handbook* on bird conservation. These are followed by a *Regional Quick Check of Birds in Jeopardy* coded to a map, reference sources and a bibliography for further study.

This book helps explain the somewhat convoluted process involved in doing our work as conservationists—and as such it is quite an education. It is never easy to find that some of your friends are in trouble, and you may be surprised by the plight of some of the birds discussed in this book. But perhaps with a little education and a little sensible action, the call of the Olive-sided Flycatcher (a bird not mentioned in this book by the way) will always ring from the top of the tallest snags in the forest. 🐦

# FIELD TRIPS

Continued from Page 12

mented in the chaparral, lakeside and oak/pine woodland habitats of the canyon. Meet at the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. From the 101 Fwy, take Coldwater Cyn. Ave. S into the hills. Immediately after Mulholland Dr. merges from the W with Coldwater Cyn. Ave., make a 90° right turn onto Franklin Cyn. Dr. and continue on to the Nature Center. The lot is past a gated drive on the left. (LA, p.22, B-6)

**Saturday, September 19 – Lake Palmdale.** Jonathan Alderfer will lead a select few on a tour of this restricted and little-birded bit of L.A. County. Vagrants have been encountered with the waterfowl and migrants in the past. Meet at the new Park-and-Ride adjacent to Lake Palmdale. Take Hwy 14 N to the Avenue S offramp E, followed by a quick right into the lot. Meet here at 7:30 a.m. sharp, and finish around 12:30 p.m. Sign-up by phone with Audubon House. Limited to 15. (LA, p.183, B-2)

**Saturday, September 19 – Small Mammal Study.** Vladimir Hrychenko will live-trap small mammals in a variety of habitats near the Kern River Preserve. Learn to tell a Peromyscus from a Microtus. Meet in the evening and early morning, and bird our way back to Los Angeles. Reserve with SASE and \$10 to LAAS. Limited to 10.

**Sunday, September 27 – Mojave Vicinity.** Leader Larry Allen. This year we will meet where Jawbone Canyon Rd. intersects Hwy 14 north of Mojave and proceed to Butterbredt Springs, Galileo Hills and a picnic, and more birds at California City Central Park. Come prepared for a hot, dusty, fun day. Take Hwy 14 past Mojave, continue N on Hwy 14 about 17 miles to Jawbone Canyon Rd. on the west side. We will meet at 6:30 a.m., so you may wish to consider local camping or motel options. Red Rock Canyon State Park 5 miles to the north is good for camping. About 2 hours driving time from Los Angeles.



*King Eider, 1st spring male,  
Redondo Beach, 28 May 1992  
Photo by Jonathan K. Alderfer*

**Sunday, October 4 – Topanga State Park.** Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See September 6 write-up for details.

**Sunday, October 4 – San Diego Area.** Nick Freeman leader. A good portion of the morning will be spent at Pt. Loma. Other areas that may be visited include the Tijuana Marsh and the Tijuana River farm fields.

Take the 5 Fwy S about 3 miles past Route 52 to the Clairemont Dr. offramp and head W into the small lot adjacent to the Mission Bay Information Center. Meet at 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch.

**Friday, October 9 – Chatsworth Park South.** Join leader Allan Keller for a morning of late migration birding. From Topanga Cyn. Blvd., go W on Devonshire and continue into the parking lot by the Recreation Center. Meet at 8:00 a.m. (LA, p.6, B-3)

**Saturday, October 10 – Whittier Narrows Regional Park.** Join Mary Carmona at 8:00 a.m. to see late migrants as well as some wintering bird arrivals. See September 5th write up for directions.

**Sunday, October 11 – Oxnard Plains.** Leader Fred Heath. We will be exploring the windbreaks and thickets that criss-cross the agricultural plains around Oxnard. Usually excellent for warblers, vireos and other migrants. From Hwy 101, take Las Posas Rd. S, turn right on Pleasant Valley Rd., and left on Laguna Rd. If coming via Hwy 1, take Pleasant Valley Rd. inland to Laguna Rd. and turn right. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the side of Laguna Rd. across from the house.

**Saturday, October 24 – Sketching Birds in the Field.** John Schmitt (see *Western Tanager* June '92 cover) will show 8 non-artists how to render useful bird sketches for field documentation. Phone LAAS for limited sign-up. Spotting scope, folding chair and sketch pad mandatory. Meet at Malibu kiosk at 8:00 a.m. 🐦

**WESTERN TANAGER**  
Published 10 times a year by  
Los Angeles Audubon Society  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard  
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6651

**EDITOR:** Jean Brandt  
**CONSERVATION:** Sandy Wohlgenuth  
**ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:**  
Kimball Garrett  
**FIELD TRIPS:** Nick Freeman  
**PROGRAMS:** Dan Kahane  
**PELAGIC TRIPS:** Phil Sayre  
**DESKTOP PUBLISHING:** WP Plus  
**PRINTING:** Marcotte Printing

Los Angeles Audubon Society is a chapter of National Audubon Society. Opinions expressed in articles or letters herein do not necessarily express the position of this publication or of LAAS.

**PRESIDENT:** E. H. Kendig, Jr.  
**1st VICE PRESIDENT:** Thomas Van Huss  
**2nd VICE PRESIDENT:** Linda Harris  
**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:** Mildred Newton  
**RECORDING SECRETARY:** Mary Thompson  
**TREASURER:** Richard Epps

Annual membership in both societies is \$35 per year, \$21 for seniors, and presently \$20 for new members for their first year. Members receive the *Western Tanager* newsletter and *Audubon* magazine, a national publication.

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

Non-members may subscribe to the *Western Tanager* for \$15 per year. The newsletter is sent by first class mail to subscribers and members who pay an additional \$7. Make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

National Headquarters, New York  
212 832-3200  
Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library and Bookstore are open  
Tuesday – Saturday  
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
213 876-0202 - office  
213 874-1318 - bird tape  
(updated Thursdays)

## 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.

**Printed on Recycled Paper**

# 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.

**September 8 – *The Other Side: The Subantarctic and Arctic We Rarely See.*** Arnold Small, world class photographer, will present our first program of the 1992–93 season. Arnold's dramatic and colorful photographs will be the vehicle for this visit to the Subantarctic Islands of Australia and New Zealand and to the Australian and French side of Antarctica.

**ID Workshop: *The Endangered Species Act: Turning the Tide.*** Dan Kahane, LAAS Program Chairman and Environmental Education Specialist for the National Audubon Society, will present a short illustrated talk on the pending reauthorizing of the Endangered Species Act.

**October 13 – *Birding the Los Angeles River—Past, Present and Future.*** Kimball L. Garrett.

ID Workshop: Jonathan Alderfer

## PELAGIC TRIPS

**Saturday, September 12** – To 2-mile deep water southwest of San Miguel Island on the *Jeffrey Arvid*, out of the Sea Landing Dock, Santa Barbara; 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 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: Kimball Garrett 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.

## FIELD TRIPS

### 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).

**Saturday, September 5 – Whittier Narrows Regional Park.** Join Ranger Ray Jolsen on the first of our continuing monthly morning walks of the season. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Nature Center at 1000 Durfee Ave. Take the 60 Fwy to South El Monte, just W of the 605 Fwy, taking the Peck Dr. exit S. Take the offramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right), and make a left into the Nature Center. (LA, p.47, D-5)

**Sunday, September 6 – Topanga State Park.** Gerry Haigh will lead participants through this diverse coastal mountain area. This is an ideal trip for a beginning birder or for someone new in the area. A plant person is usually in attendance. 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 and make a left into the park. Meet in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch at 8:00 a.m. \$3 parking fee. (LA, p.109, D-4)

**Saturday, September 12 – Sepulveda Basin Natural Area.** Leader Steve Ducatman. Migrants and early wintering birds should be starting to augment resident species. Meet at Woodley Park at 8:00 a.m. Take Burbank Blvd. W from the 405 Fwy, turn right onto Woodley Ave. and continue to the park entrance on the right. Meet in the first parking area. (LA, p.15, B-6)

**Sunday, September 13 – Franklin Canyon.** This morning walk will be led by Steven Saffier. Franklin Canyon is located between Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 100 bird species have been docu-

Los Angeles Audubon Society  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard  
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6651

DATED MATERIAL  
Please Expedite

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 276  
Glendale, CA