



WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of
The National Audubon Society

Volume 59 Number 5

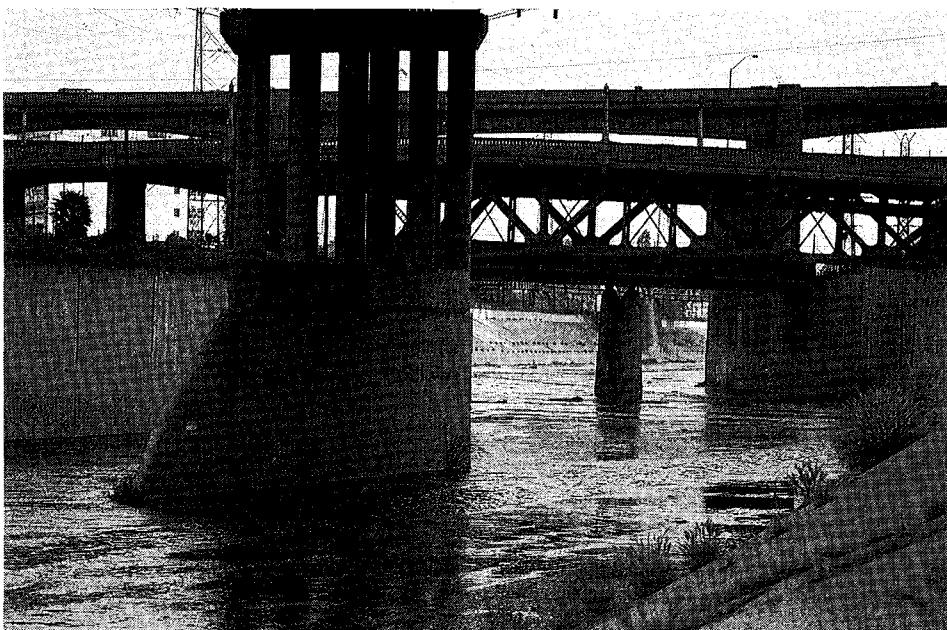
January-February 1993

Birding The Los Angeles River?

by Kimball L. Garrett

Birding along the Los Angeles River? Yeah, right! And how about skiing on Bunker Hill, or gourmet dining at Jack-In-The-Box? There is a popular perception of our city's river as a sterile concrete channel, more famous as the object of late night comedians' jokes than as a haven for wildlife. And this perception isn't always far from the truth, for the river has been transformed from a meandering and sometimes powerful watercourse bordered by lush riparian growth into one of the world's most thorough flood control plumbing jobs. Nevertheless, not so much by design as by serendipity, parts of the river system today harbor an excellent diversity of wildlife and offer some of our best local birding. This article will describe some of these areas, giving hints on access and notes on the birds to be found.

The Los Angeles River drains an area of over 2,000 square kilometers, including all of the hills surrounding the San Fernando Valley and much of the coastal slope of the western San Gabriel Mountains. Its highest source waters are at about 7,000' in the high country stretching from Mt. Gleason to the Charlton/Chilao area. In its natural state, this river system was closely



*Los Angeles River channel at the Pasadena Freeway:
even this "sterile" part of the river hosts flocks of "peeps."*

linked to the San Gabriel River which drains the high central bulk of the San Gabriels. Through a feat of flood control engineering, these two river systems nearly join in the Whittier Narrows area then are shunted on separate paths to the sea — the Los Angeles River flowing into Long Beach Harbor in western Long Beach, and the San Gabriel channeled into the sea between Alamitos Bay and Seal Beach, a few miles to the east.

Historically, of course, the Los Angeles River didn't know the confines of a narrow channel. Sometimes it pushed westward to what we now know as Marina del Rey and Ballona Creek. More often it flowed south into what is now Los Angeles Harbor. As its path through the basin wandered, it created wide areas of marshes and willow/cottonwood bottomlands. Stretches of the river could transform from dry, gravelly washes to raging floodwaters dur-

ing winter storms, and it was this dynamic element of the river that caused a developing Los Angeles metropolis to seek to control it. The channelization of the river and construction of numerous flood control dams were mainly realized in the 1930s and 1940s when habitat preservation took a remote back seat to more immediate urban needs. The riparian bottomlands and marshes disappeared, and breeding Long-eared Owls, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Willow Flycatchers, Bell's Vireos, American Bitterns and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks were reduced to items of historical interest; a vast estuary system at the river's mouths was demolished, and along with it went the Clapper Rails and other species. Open habitats flanking the river, including grasslands, coastal sage scrub, and valley oak savanna, succumbed to urbanization as the channelized river invited urban development right up to its now "safe" banks. The natural ground-water recharging and protective mantle of vegetation yielded to a "get-this-damned-water-to-the-ocean-before-it-does-some-damage" mentality, and our present concrete and asphalt city was born.

Our knowledge of the historical birdlife of the Los Angeles River is derived mostly from collections of skins and egg sets made by an intrepid group of ornithologists and hobbyists from the late 1800s through the early part of this century. The egg and nest collections of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo have been particularly enlightening in tracing the breeding birds of the river drainage in those early years.

Nowadays, birding along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries is most productive at a handful of isolated sites in the lowlands and in almost any canyon in the higher country. The channelized portion in Long Beach is perhaps the best locality for fall shore-

birds in Los Angeles County, and the "soft-bottomed" stretch of the river channel in the Glendale Narrows area hosts a surprising diversity of birds, especially from late summer through early winter. Three flood control basins — the Sepulveda Basin, Hansen Dam Basin, and the Whittier Narrows Basin — are among the most actively birded spots in the Los Angeles area. Several other basins, such as the one behind Devil's Gate Dam, show potential as well. How many visitors to those basins realize that they are actually birding the Los Angeles River (or its important tributaries, Tujunga Creek at Hansen Dam and the Rio Hondo at Whittier Narrows)? Furthermore, did you ever consider that when birding the shaded alder and oak woods at Switzer's Picnic Area or the conifer-clad slopes of Charlton Flat or Chilao you are actually in the uppermost reaches of the Los Angeles River system? It is the Arroyo Seco that flows through Switzer's, eventually to meet its concrete demise where the Pasadena

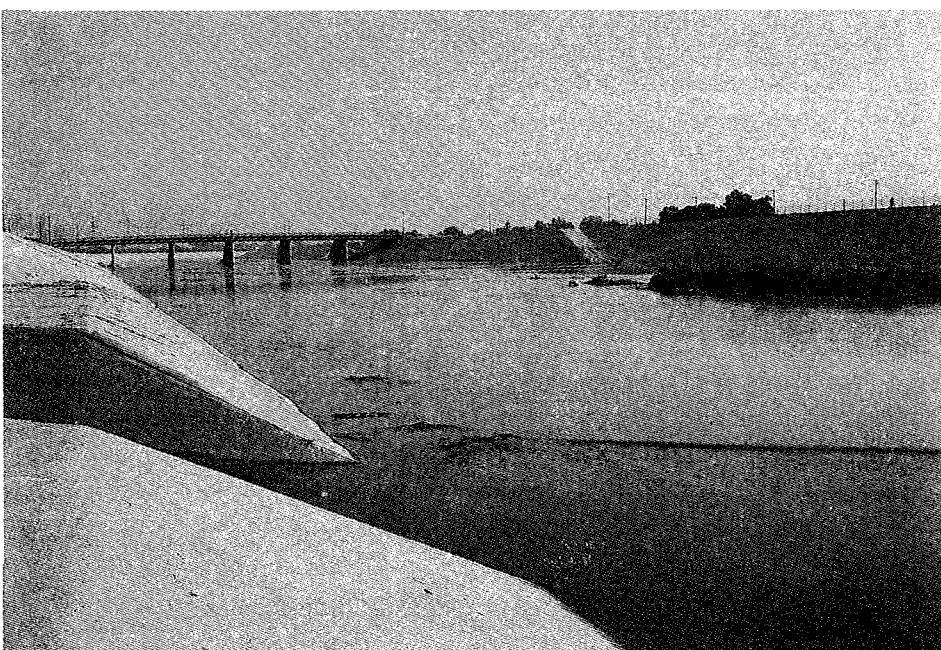
and Golden State Freeways cross north of downtown Los Angeles. Charlton and Chilao are within the Alder Creek drainage, which in turn flows into Big Tujunga Creek and ultimately into the main Los Angeles River channel in Studio City.

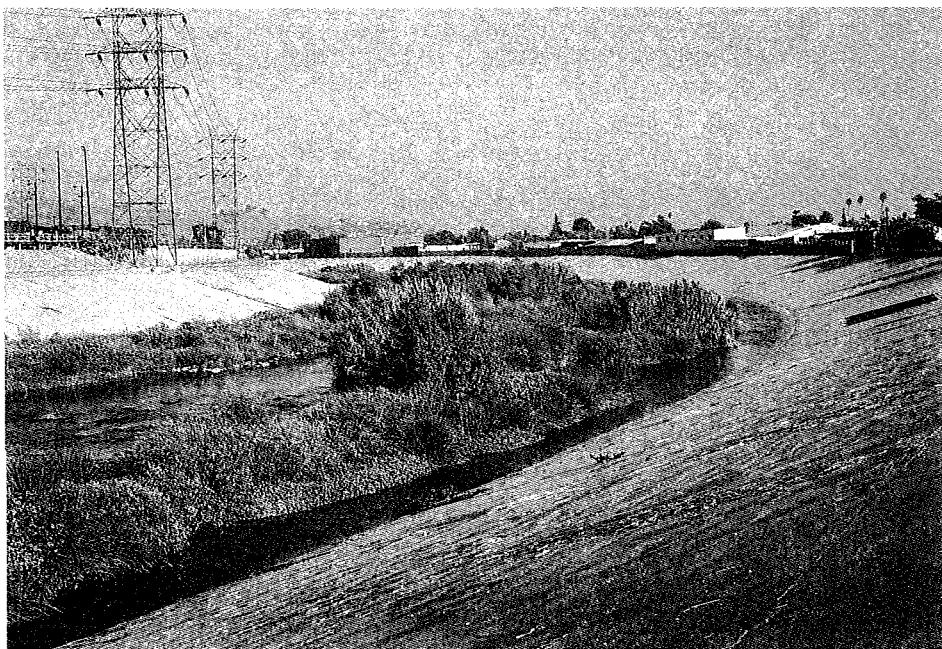
Some of the birding sites along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries are covered in Hank Childs' book *Where Birders Go In Southern California* (second edition in preparation). Holt's *Birders' Guide to Southern California* omits most of these sites (and erroneously suggests that there is open water behind Devil's Gate Dam!). The following treats the major sites in a little more detail.

Long Beach Area

Up to 10,000 shorebirds in a day have recently been recorded in fall from the lower channel of the Los Angeles River. Western Sandpipers nearly always predominate, but Solitary, Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers are regular in August and September, and one or two Semipalmated Sand-

Los Angeles River channel at the mouth of Compton Creek in North Long Beach: some of the best fall shorebird habitat in the county.





The river channel in the "Glendale Narrows."

pipers are picked out every year. Rarities recorded here have included Ruff, Common Black-headed Gull, Reddish Egret, and White/Black-backed Wagtail. Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets have nested just below Willow Street, and a good variety of ducks may occupy the open water just south of there (Blue-winged Teal can be numerous).

There is good birding from the bicycle path on the east bank of the river from Pacific Coast Highway north to Long Beach Blvd. Beware of cyclists whizzing by, and be careful not to hit them with your tripod legs as you walk along! Access is best gained at the following two sites, both just east of the river channel and the Long Beach (710) Freeway. A spotting scope is a must. From Del Amo Blvd., turn south on Oregon Ave., the first street east of the river. Park immediately and walk back along Del Amo to the entrance to the river bike path. Depending on conditions, shorebirds can be abundant upstream as far as Long Beach Blvd. and downstream for nearly five miles.

For faster access to the areas far

downstream, take the Willow Street (East) offramp from the Long Beach Freeway, cross the river channel, and turn right (south) on Golden Ave. Turn right again almost immediately on 25th Way and park at the end, a couple of hundred yards west. Walk through the fence opening and up the short hill to the bike path. Birding is excellent upstream (shorebirds) and downstream (shorebirds, ducks).

Keep your eyes and ears open for landbirds in the brushy areas in the overflow basins bordering the channel and at the edge of the residential areas.

The Glendale Narrows

For about eight miles between the Pasadena Freeway and the northern side of Griffith Park, the bottom of the Los Angeles River channel is not completely concreted. The soft bottom in this stretch has allowed a mixture of willows, cattails and other native plants to exist along with numerous exotic annual and perennial species. The annual growth is especially lush from

early summer until the first heavy winter rains. Riparian species such as Common Yellowthroats and Song Sparrows are abundant breeders, and some waterbirds (Mallards, Cinnamon Teal, Pied-billed Grebes and coots) also manage to nest here. A good variety of shorebirds and waterfowl can be found in migration, although the numbers do not approach those of the Long Beach area. The county's only recent Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was found in this area in the fall of 1991. Warblers and other migrants can be diverse in fall, and many warblers will remain well into the winter if winter storms do not knock down the habitat. Prairie, Tennessee, Blackpoll and Black-throated Green Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Scarlet Tanager, Bobolink, and Tropical Kingbird have been found in recent falls. Spectacular concentrations of Vaux's Swifts are sometimes seen here in late April, early May, September and October, and a rare "four swift species coup" occurred recently at the end of May. Exotic finches (including weavers, estrildids, and three species of bishops) are frequent here, a challenging if not wholly welcome development for the birder.

The best birding is from the south/west bank between the Glendale Freeway and the Pasadena/Golden State Freeway interchange. Access is via the ends of several streets that run north from Riverside Drive and dead-end at the river. Try Newell St., Allesandro St., Dallas St., or Riverdale Ave. Walk along the top of the river bank or (IF THE WATER IS LOW AND THERE IS NO THREAT OF RAIN) along the bottom of the channel at the edge of the vegetation. The large open area across the river is the Taylor Yard, where scaled-back railroad yard operations have left a bonanza of open space (albeit tainted with toxins) with a hotly-contested future. There is also good birding from the east bank of the chan-

nel at Los Feliz Ave., though the river is right alongside the Golden State Freeway here. Park (and eat) on the north side of Los Feliz Ave. at "Eatz," the unofficial diner of the Friends of the Los Angeles River. Farther upstream, the stretch of the river at the Ventura/Golden State Freeway interchange is good for shorebirds. Park along Zoo Dr. adjacent to the soccer fields. White-throated Swifts roost under the Ventura Freeway where it crosses the river channel.

Sepulveda Basin

This open flood control basin has a long history of good coverage and good birds. The spot where Jon Dunn cut his birding teeth in the late 1960s, the basin has seen a lot of changes in the past 25 years. Agricultural fields have all but disappeared and high-density recreation has claimed much of the basin. The Short-eared and Burrowing Owls are gone, and hawk numbers are down. On the positive side, a portion of the eastern part of the basin now offers very user-friendly birding as a wildlife preserve, and Los Angeles Audubon is at the hub of exciting plans to enhance wildlife habitats within the basin.

The standard birding access is via Woodley Park, east of Woodley Ave. Walk south from there along the western side of the wildlife preserve, and don't forget to continue south under Burbank Blvd. to the southern wildlife area. The willows along the south side of Burbank Blvd. often have Blue Grosbeaks in summer, and the Los Angeles River channel is worth covering between Burbank and Balboa Blvds. The sod farms east of Woodley Ave. are poor as wildlife habitat but have hosted longspurs. Longspurs, pipits, and sparrows may also be seen in the ever-dwindling stubble fields adjacent to the sod fields. Do NOT walk on the sod! The various small lakes on the golf course west

of Woodley Ave. are worth a check for Eurasian Wigeon and other birds, and the new Balboa Lake (east of Balboa Blvd.) has already hosted a few grebes, Bonaparte's Gulls, and ducks.

Hansen Dam

Intensive, almost daily field work by Dustin Alcala and others is putting Hansen Dam on the map as one of the premier birding spots in the Los Angeles area. The extensive willow forest holds a treasure trove of migrants, along with breeding riparian species such as Bell's Vireos (not annual), Yellow Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chats. Gravel extraction operations (a ceaseless and probably hopeless attempt to remove the pieces of the San Gabriel Mountains that annually wash into the dam basin) are constantly changing the face of the basin, but we can only hope that some protection will be afforded the willow forest and marshy ponds in the area.

Access is best from Hansen Dam Park, at the east end of Dronfield Ave. Walk around the perimeter of the willow forest or, cautiously, along a few dead end trails into the willows. All of the parks in this area can become extremely crowded (and rowdy!) on weekends, so plan to bird on weekdays or early in the morning. A marshy area that is good for shorebirds, sparrows, and other birds is found in the Tujunga Creek Wash farther up the basin, adjacent to Orcas Park. Park in the lot at the end of Orcas Ave., south of Foothill Blvd. Again, don't bother coming here on weekend afternoons!

Big Tujunga Wash

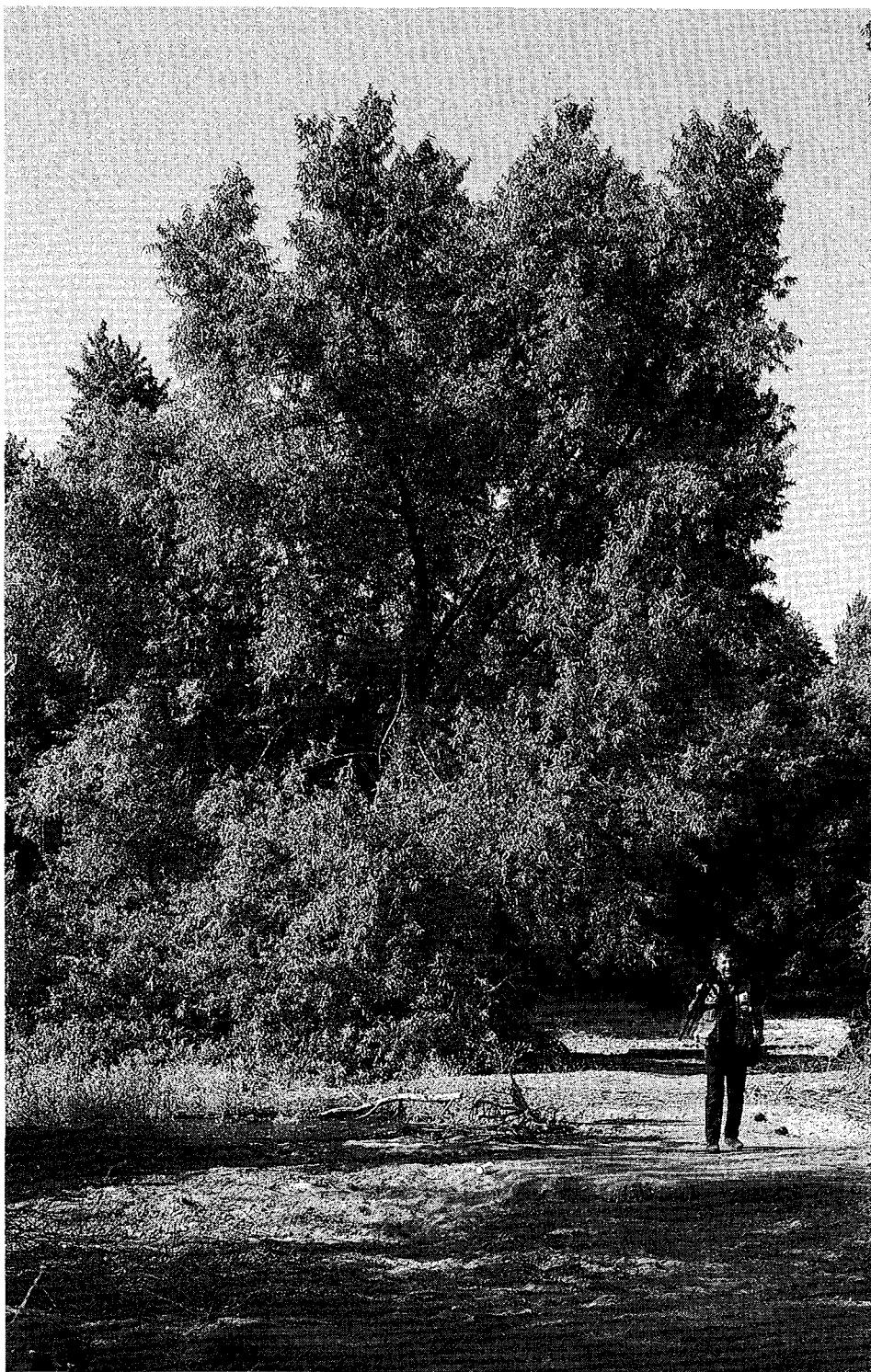
Few areas of alluvial (wash) scrub remain on the coastal slopes of our mountains. Big Tujunga Wash, straddling the Foothill Freeway in Sunland,

is one of our largest remaining examples of this dwindling habitat. Cholla cactus, yucca, and a variety of stiff-twiggled shrubs recall habitats of the desert regions, and indeed a number of plant and animal species found here are rare elsewhere on the coastal slope. Greater Roadrunners, Lesser Nighthawks, Cactus Wrens and Rock Wrens still breed in fair numbers in the Tujunga Wash, but their future is uncertain as plans to convert the wash to a private golf club are fast becoming a reality.

The lower wash can be accessed from the south end of Christy Ave., which is off Foothill Blvd. just a few blocks west of the Wheatland offramp from the Foothill (210) Freeway. Park at the south end of Christy and walk south, then east, through the alluvial scrub. Cactus Wrens nest here, and there is a possible recent sighting of California Gnatcatcher (which was formerly common in this area). The upper wash is reached by taking Oro Vista north from Foothill Blvd., about a mile east of the Foothill Freeway. Turn left at Grove Ave., park at the end of the street, and walk out into the wash. Or continue up Oro Vista until it joins Big Tujunga Canyon Rd., park along Big Tujunga Rd. and walk out into the wash. Lesser Nighthawks are readily seen at dusk from April until July; Cactus Wrens and roadrunners are widely but sparsely distributed, and sparrows can be abundant in the fall, winter and spring.

Arroyo Seco

These days the Arroyo Seco through Pasadena and South Pasadena is a rather tame, parklike habitat with majestic western sycamores but little of the dense riparian woodland that characterized the stream early in the century. As a green path through an urban area, however, the Arroyo certainly has the potential



Willow forest behind Hansen Dam.

to turn up interesting birds. Devil's Gate Dam, on the Arroyo just north of the Foothill Freeway, is now silted up and contains no open water. Patches of willows and brush are attractive to sparrows, finches and buntings. The

dam basin can be reached via Oak Grove Park, off Oak Grove Dr. near the Berkshire offramp. The stately live oaks in the park should be checked, along with the brush in the dam basin. There is often a seep of water near the base of the dam

that is attractive to birds. Oak Grove Park can be quite crowded on weekends.

A hiking trail leads up the Arroyo Seco from the vicinity of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The shady alder-lined canyon has breeding Swainson's Thrushes, Warbling Vireos, and Canyon Wrens. Many of these same birds can be seen in the upper Arroyo Seco at Switzer's Picnic Area, along the Angeles Crest Highway just beyond the Angeles Forest Highway junction. The tired warning bears repeating: Switzer's is alive with people and dead for birding after mid-morning on summer weekends.

Upper Big Tujunga Drainage

To really explore the upper Los Angeles River drainage, try birding some of the riparian sites along Mill Creek, a tributary of Big Tujunga Creek. On the way up Big Tujunga Canyon you might stop at Vogel Flat, a woodsy canyon-bottom picnic area that once hosted a Hepatic Tanager and often has a good variety of birds in winter. Turn left where Big Tujunga Canyon Rd. hits the Angeles Forest Highway. One of the best birding spots along Mill Creek is at the Monte Cristo Campground. Here birds abound in the riparian thickets, and Black-chinned Sparrows sing in spring on the surrounding slopes.

Rio Hondo

Most of the Rio Hondo is channelized in concrete, but there is a good "living" stretch adjacent to the Whittier Narrows Recreation area north of the Pomona Freeway, just west of Rosemead Blvd. Park at Loma Ave. and Cortez Dr. within the recreation area and walk west to the river channel. The Rio Hondo is well-vegetated from here south to the Whittier

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

"The King is dead, long live the King!" So ran the opening line of this column nearly 12 years ago. Ronald Reagan had just been inaugurated after his demolition of Jimmy Carter and his coattails had carried along a Republican Senate. We were not very happy with the prospect before us. As governor, Mr. Reagan was known as the man who said that when you'd seen one redwood, you'd seen them all; that trees were responsible for air pollution;

that conservation meant you were hot in the summer and cold in the winter. James Watt had been the choice as Secretary of the Interior, and we already had received a taste of his radical right philosophy. (What is the real motive of the extreme environmentalists... is it to weaken America?)

This extraordinary election will bring many changes. At this writing the future is a vast unknown. The successful candidates are still nursing sore

throats and recovering from their ordeal. There are no cabinet appointments as yet to give us a hint of what kind of four years lie ahead. There have been promises of change in the economy, in health care, in women's choice, in campaign reform. But relatively little has been said about the environment. New "liberal" faces in the White House, a new generation in power provoke an assumption of change for the better. Bill Clinton has a

Birding The Los Angeles River?

continued

Narrows Dam, although the exotic bamboo-like giant reed (*Arundo donax*) dominates in most areas and is not particularly attractive to wildlife. There is excellent birding just to the east along the San Gabriel River and at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center's "New Lakes," as well as at Legg Lake.



The list of sites above is obviously not exhaustive, and further exploration of the river system, from Compton Creek to the high country, is encouraged. It will be especially interesting to document the birdlife of some of the tributary canyons in the northwestern San Fernando Valley (Browns, Limekiln) before these succumb to development. As always, thorough records from active birders are the best hope for providing a record of the bird life of our area through the wholesale

changes the future will bring.

It is difficult to tell what the future holds for the Los Angeles River. Architects and planners are increasingly enthusiastic about the river's cultural and recreational potential, and conservation organizations are embracing the river's possibilities as wildlife habitat and open space in a city starved for such values. Some particularly poetic urban planners see the river as a corridor linking the city's multiple cultures and would like the river to be a central element in the renewal of the inner city. On the other hand, rabidly pro-development local governments in Los Angeles County are not likely to make open space and wildlife habitat a high priority without considerable pressure from their constituencies. A major private golf course in the heart of Big Tujunga Wash is a near *fait accompli*, and the Porter Ranch development in the northern valley will forever change the river's northwestern tributaries. There are increasing pressures to urbanize the Sepulveda Basin and promote an ever higher density of recreation in the other

basins. An Army Corps of Engineers Plan to increase the flood control capacity of the main river channel by reshaping the channel and building higher walls may profoundly affect the occurrence of shorebirds in the Long Beach area. And the incredible suggestion that the river be turned into a transportation corridor never seems to completely die a well-deserved death.

The next few years will be of critical importance in planning for the future of the Los Angeles River, and the voices of wildlife enthusiasts and the conservation organizations to which we belong should be raised loudly as we seek to restore some level of ecological dignity to the Los Angeles River basin. ➤



Kimball Garrett is the Ornithology Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. He and several co-workers at the museum have just completed a study of the biota of the Los Angeles River for the California Department of Fish and Game.

heap of problems ahead, foreign and domestic. What can we reasonably expect from him for an environment that has been tragically neglected and abused for far too long?

- With a Democratic Congress will the expected assault on the Endangered Species Act be turned aside? Will there be more money for more staff to begin more recovery programs for already listed species? Will it be possible to strengthen the Act so that whole ecosystems are saved rather than the present "one-species-at-a-time" practice?

- Who will be the new Secretary of the Interior? Will Manuel Lujan's "God Squad" that is assuring the demise of the Spotted Owl by savagely reducing its habitat be pushed into the shadows? Will we again have a genuine steward of our wild places in the mold of Cecil Andrus and Stewart Udall?

- Can we anticipate the abandonment of the nasty, deceptive redefinition of wetlands offered by President Bush that would have left us with half our already depleted wetlands? Can we hope for a new policy that would further protect and enhance what is left?

- The Clean Air Act of 1990 has been butchered by Dan Quayle's Council on Competitiveness. Can we look forward to the transformation of this secretive cabal of cabinet members to the Al Gore Council on Conservation?

- Will there be a new deal on the sale of federal timber? Will the Forest Service continue its role as purveyor of trees below cost to the timber barons as the Service builds logging roads for them on public land and at public expense?

- Will there be a fresh look at grazing rights and low fees on federal grasslands where powerful, entrenched ranchers feel they have ancestral ownership?

- Will there be a chance for the California Desert Protection Act that lost every year because Senators Pete Wilson and

John Seymour refused to support it?

- Will the United States rejoin the world and approve the biodiversity agreement we turned down at the Rio Summit? Ditto for reducing greenhouse gases to slow global warming?
- Who will be the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency? Bill Reilly? Freed from the shackles of the Bush people, this former head of the World Wildlife Fund might do a good job. But he didn't have the guts to resign when his ideas were consistently shot down, and he spoke for his boss on TV at the Republican convention.
- What will be the role of Vice-President Al Gore, author of *Earth In The Balance, Ecology of the Human Spirit*, labeled "Mr. Ozone," "environmental extremist," by George Bush. The presence of Al Gore in the White House is most assuring to those of us who wonder about Clinton's conservation credentials. Gore will have much to say in this critical area.

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We may expect stress on the economic benefits of environmental enhancement: new jobs in pollution control, encouragement of new technologies for energy efficiency that will save costs and increase our competitive edge. A new administration could promote the transition to electric and natural gas power for government vehicles and so set an example for the auto industry.

Possibly the change we can really expect, at the very least, is the tone of a Clinton/Gore administration toward the environment: cooperative rather than confrontational.

The greatest gift of all is the absence of the "environmental president," his cohorts and his vetoes. A world without Lujan and Quayle and other environmental predators

is devoutly to be wished.

The big question is: Can Bill Clinton, who ran as a middle-of-the-road Democrat, stand up against the powerful interests that were coddled by Reagan and Bush? How is he going to answer the key demand that regulations be removed or reduced; regulations, they say, that cost too much and make them unable to compete in the global marketplace? Weakening regulations, on the other hand, endangers our health and the earth's health as poisons filter into the ground water, acid rains destroy limpid lakes and carbon dioxide and CFCs affect the very atmosphere. Clinton's priorities are jobs and the economy and he must work amicably with business and industry. Can he have it both ways — a growing economy and protection for wildlife and the environment?

This is going to be an interesting time. There are great expectations in the electorate for positive change. And the public desire for environmental protection is still strong. More than 100 brand new congressmen and Senators are considered to be more liberal than Clinton and (we hope) will support an aggressive environmental program. Much depends upon where Bill Clinton really stands on the environment. We can only wait and see.

The environmental community, as it bids a happy farewell to 12 years of Reagan/Bush, must be on its toes. Despite the euphoria of a release from hostility, the community should maintain its critical role. It must be ready to support the new leaders and the Congress when good things occur and let its voice be emphatically heard when undesirable legislation is proposed.

It won't be long before the transition is over and the ballgame begins. The chances for progress are better than they've been for a long time. Can we look forward to a championship season? 

Lens View

by Herb Clarke

Many techniques and much equipment have been discussed in these columns, but the question remains. How can this knowledge be put to use? In other words, where can one find birds to photograph?

There are a number of guides to birding locales that give precise directions to places where a great variety of special birds can be viewed or photographed with relative ease. Our own LAAS Bookstore has a good selection of these publications for sale.

An ideal location is your home garden. Here you can maintain control of all aspects of your endeavor. Planting, feeders and water sources can be arranged for optimum photographic advantage without distraction or other human annoyances. Photographing through an open window or door using the house as a blind is an excellent method. Avoid shooting through glass to prevent reflections or color distortion. A permanent blind could be built. Care should be taken to prevent predation by cats. If you live in an apartment, it might be possible to set up a window feeder to attract birds for close-ups.

Wildlife refuges and parks can be productive photographically. At these places, birds often are accustomed to people and can be approached closely. Some refuges have interpretive nature roads that, by using the car as a blind, allow leisurely picture taking. Picnic areas can attract birds which will feed out of your hand. Side roads in remote areas are good places to photograph

roadside species from the car. Don't forget to obtain permission to enter private property and to obey any restrictions while on public lands. Edges of lakes and streams, where shorebirds and waders concentrate, are great locations to take pictures. The seashore is similarly excellent. Waterfowl frequently winter in city parks where they become tame because of feeding by people.

There are even commercial tours specializing in wildlife photography. These are advertised in various photography magazines. In addition, classes in nature photography are offered in



A duck pond at a city park is a good place to photograph gulls, ducks, and other birds.

these magazines as well as through local camera stores. Incidentally, photography magazines can be a gold mine for tips on improving technique, and they regularly feature the latest in camera gadgetry. Purchasing film and equipment from highly competitive mail order houses advertising in these publications can save a lot of money.

You might want to target specialty birds by going on a pelagic birding trip where often this is the only way to photo-

tograph avian ocean wanderers. Or perhaps travel to a known location where birds such as Bald Eagles, Sandhill Cranes or grouse congregate in season. If you are not adverse to photographing caged birds, you can have a lot of fun and gain practice by visiting a zoo such as the excellent one in San Diego, whose walk-in flight cages allow close approach of exotic birds from all over the world. Here flash is indispensable, but most birds are banded so try to avoid bands showing in your picture.

Perhaps the most satisfying way to photograph a bird is at the nest. This can be done with or without a blind, depending on the circumstances. Remember the safety of the bird is paramount. Knowledge of the particular species' life-style is a requirement in the ability to find its nest.

Sometimes it is possible to set up a temporary feeding station or water drip in a likely location. This is a hit-or-miss situation and usually requires some time for birds to accept a new-found bonanza.

Always have your camera equipment accessible, ready to use and with plenty of film. I have missed many a golden opportunity, not following my own advice and experience, by not having my camera ready or running out of film and seeing the bird fly off while I was fumbling with my gear.

There are many ways to overcome the problem of finding birds to photograph. Much depends on the imagination, skill, luck and patience of the photographer. There is nothing that matches the exultation of successfully capturing your prey on film after overcoming many obstacles. In addition, your subject lives on in life as well as being immortalized in your photograph which you can now share with the world. 

Birds Of The Season

by Hank Brodkin

While January and February are not the busiest birding months in southern California, many productive hours can be spent in the field. The beginning of January can usually be spent studying the interesting birds turned up on the many local Christmas counts. For a real challenge, try sorting out the up to four plumages per species of gull at a place like Malibu Lagoon. An excellent guide is *Gulls: A Guide to Identification* by Grant — available at the LAAS Bookstore. The wildlife refuges at the south end of the Salton Sea are world renowned. If you've never seen a cloud of Snow Geese against the blue desert sky, you have a life memory waiting for you! Also check coastal promontories after storms for pelagics blown toward shore. And it's always possible that a "Siberian express" will bring in a bird that has never been seen in the country before, so be sure to report the unusual!

The winter invasion of Pine Siskins continued to the coast. A scattering of Purple Finches, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets and Varied Thrushes was seen in the lowlands. The first two Hooded Mergansers at Pepperdine Ponds were reported on 6 November (Bob Pann), and by 19 November the number had increased to 13 (Barbara Elliott).

Two Red-billed Tropicbirds were seen independently in the Catalina Channel on 18 October (Tom Frillman, Mary Jane Bloomingdale). A Little Blue Heron was reported from Sun Valley on 6 November (Doug Martin), and a Reddish Egret was reported by an Orange County birder on 24 October (fide

Mike San Miguel) and is still being seen at this writing (21 November).

Two Eurasian Wigeon were on Newport Back Bay on 25 October (Sherman Suter), and a female Common Goldeneye returned to Malibu Lagoon for the second winter (Ken and Sue Youngleib).

An unprecedented three Groove-billed Anis visited southern California this fall. The first bird showed up at Sue Clark's ranch north of Blythe in early October. The next was found in some tamarisks at Baker on 22 October (Paul Lehman), and the third was found at Whittier Narrows on 8-9 November (Ray Jillson).

On 21 October, nine Inca Doves and six Ruddy Ground-Doves were at Furnace Creek (Tom and Jo Heindel), constituting almost an invasion of *Columbina* doves.

A Least Flycatcher was at Galileo Park, California City, on 25 October (Arnold Small and Larry Sansone), and L.A. County's first Dusky-capped Flycatcher was found on the Cal State Dominguez Hills campus on 4-5 November (John Ivanov). A very rare Veery turned up at Galileo Park on 25 October (Hank & Priscilla Brodkin), and a Bendire's Thrasher was at the San Jacinto Wildlife Reserve near Lakeview, Riverside County (MSM).

Warbler reports include a Tennessee at Exposition Park on 4 November (Kimball Garrett), a Chestnut-sided at Huntington Beach Central Park on 26 October (MSM), a Magnolia at Harbor Park on 23 October (JI), two different Black-throated Blues at Galileo — one on 2 October and one on the 8th

(H&PB), a Black-throated Green at Hansen Dam on 28 October (Dustin Alcala), a Pine at Furnace Creek on 21 October (T&JH), a Blackpoll at Harbor Park on 23 October (JI), a Prothonotary in Lone Pine, Inyo County, on 14 November (Andrew Kirk), an Ovenbird remaining at Banning Park after 6 November (Mitch Heindel), a Northern Waterthrush in Big Sycamore Canyon on 6 November (BP), a Kentucky at Galileo on 25 October (H&PB), and a Painted Redstart at the Getty Museum in Malibu on 30 October (Scott Smithson).

A very late Blue Grosbeak report came from Madrona Marsh on 18 November (David Moody). An American Tree Sparrow was at Galileo on 2 November (H&PB), two Clay-colored Sparrows were at Harbor Park on 23 October (JI), three Swamp Sparrows and two White-throated Sparrows were at California City on 27 October (Bill Principe), and two White-throateds were in Solstice Canyon, Malibu on 6 November (Anna Lea). For the second year in a row, a Common Grackle showed up in the same back yard in Big Pine, Inyo County, this year on 7 November (T&JH).

A very birdy New Year to all! 

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

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

F I E L D T R I P S

Continued from Page 12

Saturday, January 23 - Lakeview Area. Leader Monte Taylor will show us around this excellent winter birding area in search of buteos, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, longspurs, owls and myriad waterfowl. Take the 60 Fwy E past the 215 Fwy, exit Son Gilman Springs Rd., and continue about 6 miles to the Bridge St. intersection. Meet at the side of the road at 8:30 a.m. Bring lunch, scopes, warm clothing and durable footwear. Entrance fee \$3-4 (bring ones and quarters).

Saturday, January 30 - Van Norman Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. The reservoir

and small ponds dot the riparian and grassland habitat of the grounds. Hooded Mergansers are probable, and a good selection of gulls is likely, due to a dump nearby. Take the 405 Fwy N to the Rinaldi offramp just S of the 5 Fwy interchange. Go W on Rinaldi about a mile to the front gate on the right (N). Meet in the lot inside the gate on the left. We will carpool from here at 8:00 a.m., and stop about 12:30. Restrooms on-site.

Sunday, January 31 - Quail Lake Vicinity. Leader Louis Tucker. If no rain, we will explore some backroads, so bring durable vehicles. Ferruginous Hawk and others

probable, Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk possible. Bring lunch and warm clothes. Leave promptly from Carl's Jr. in Gorman at 8:30 a.m.

Saturday, February 6 - Gull Mini-Workshop. Field seminar on gulls given by our own Larry Allen. Includes a short discussion on gull identification and Larry's field-tested handout. Bring lunch, coat, *National Geographic Field Guide*, and a scope if you have one. Thayer's Gull if we're lucky. We will meet at the Malibu Lagoon parking lot kiosk at 8:00 a.m. Free parking on Cross Creek Rd. (just west of lagoon bridge). Trip will finish at McGrath State Park in Oxnard. (LA, p.114, B-5)

Sunday, February 7 - Topanga State Park. Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 a.m. First Sunday each month. See January 3 write-up for details.

Saturday, February 13 - Whittier Narrows. Leader Ray Jillson. Meet at 8:00 a.m. Usually second Saturday Sept. - May. See January 9 write-up for details.

Saturday, February 13 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. Meet at 7:30 a.m. See January 16 write-up for details.

Saturday, February 20 - Point Mugu. The base biologist will be pointing out shorebirds, gulls, sea ducks and other birds on this limited access military base. Take the 101 Fwy W to Las Posas Rd. S, take PCH N onto Wood Rd., head W then S on the frontage road to the lot at the main (#1) gate. Meet at 8:00 a.m. The limited attendance list must be submitted to the base, so sign up early. Must be 16 years old. Scopes but no cameras, please. Include in your reservation request an SASE, citizenship status, phone number, Social Security Number and a \$5 deposit to be refunded at the gate.

Sunday, February 21 - Sepulveda Basin Natural Area. Leader Steve Ducatman. Good for wintering waterfowl, raptors and riparian and chaparral passerines. 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 Woodley Park entrance on the right. Meet in the first parking area. (LA, p.15, B-6)

Saturday and Sunday, February 27 and 28 - Salton Sea. Nick Freeman leads this spectacular winter birding trip to see and hear 150 Sandhill Cranes and thousands of White-faced Ibis as they wheel and glide,

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

Trips Aboard the Vantuna out of Los Angeles Harbor

Saturday, February 6, 1993. Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: Herb Clarke and Mitch Heindel.

Sunday, March 21, 1993. Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: Bruce Broadbooks and Mitch Heindel.

Sunday, May 16, 1993. Santa Barbara Island and Osborne Banks or leeward side of island and out to sea; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$32. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Jonathan Alderfer.

Saturday, June 5, 1993. Santa Barbara Island and out to sea; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Cost \$32. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Arnold Small.

Saturday, July 10, 1993. Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost \$20. Leaders: Sherman Suter and Mitch Heindel.

1993 Trips out of Ventura Marina

Friday/Saturday, April 23-24. A 24-hour trip from Ventura due west to the Continental trough (9,000 ft. depth), 10 hours along this slope and returning by San Nicholas Island. Friday, 11:59 p.m. to Saturday, 11:59 p.m. Cost: \$110. Includes bunk and three meals (beer and sodas extra). Please bring binocs, cameras and wet gear only. Leaders: Guy McCaskie, Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel.

Saturday, July 4. Seaward side of Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands, via Anacapa Island. 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Cost: \$64. Leaders: Arnold Small and Mitch Heindel.

Saturday, September 4. Seaward side of Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands, via Anacapa Island. 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Cost: \$64. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel.

gently descending on their roosting grounds. Meet at Cattle Call Park south of Brawley to leave at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday. Take Hwy 111 S to Brawley, head W thru town on Main St., then continue S on Hwy 86 to a fairly quick right on Cattle Call Dr., continuing to the fenced grassy area by the arena. Sunday morning, we will regroup (and welcome late-comers) at Carl's Jr. at Main and First Sts. in Brawley, leaving there at 7:00 a.m. A good trip for Canada, Snow and Ross' Geese, Burrowing Owl, Gila Woodpecker, Stilt Sandpiper, Yellow-footed Gull and White Pelican. Anticipate mud. Bring lunch, scopes, warm clothes. Large group may be split. Please register with LAAS (no fee or limit).

Saturday, March 6 - Ventura County Game Preserve. Leader TBA. This duck club is an excellent spot to observe waterfowl, raptors and other marsh and grasslands birds. We have seen Sora and Virginia Rail well here, as well as bittern, Eurasian Wigeon, dark Red-tails and Snow Geese. Take the 101 Fwy W to Las Posas Rd. S, then take Hueneme Rd. W to Casper Rd. We will meet at the start of Casper Rd. at 8:00 a.m. Limited sign-up with LAAS.

Sunday, March 7 - Topanga State Park. Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 3 write-up for details.

Saturday, March 13 - Whittier Narrows. Leader Mary Carmona. Meet at 8:00 a.m. See January 9 write-up for details.

Saturday, March 13 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. Meet at 7:30 a.m. See January 16 write-up for details.

Saturday and Sunday, March 21 and 22 - Owens Valley Grouse Trip. Mary Carmona will orchestrate this road-intensive weekend. Sunday morning we will meet very early. Rosy Finches, Blue Grouse, Sage Grouse, Sage Thrashers, Pinyon Jays, Osprey and winnowing Snipe are all to be expected. Limited to 16. Reserve with a \$10 check to LAAS per policy. Include SASE for 7:30 a.m. Big Pine meeting location and lodging list.



Field Trip Policies and Guidelines

by Nick Freeman

The field trip guidelines are often, although not always, mentioned in the write-ups. Please keep these points in mind when preparing for field trips. Most involve plain common sense.

1) Dress intelligently. Unless you are familiar with a locale, assume that mud and thorny brush will be encountered. Wear tennis shoes and shorts at your own risk.

2) Field trips tend to either finish between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. or they are full-day trips. If a trip is described as full-day or covers extensive or distant areas, bring food and beverages for the day.

3) Try to carpool with friends, or call Audubon House for carpool leads on sign-up trips. As conservation-minded as birdwatchers are, we really burn a lot of gas on these trips. Let's do what we can to keep it down.

4) No pets on field trips. They draw attention away from the leader, the wildlife and the countryside, and detract from the enjoyment of our walks. In consideration of other birders and the leader, please leave your pets at home.

5) Leaders will usually wait 15 minutes before leaving the meeting site. If the trip is written up to leave promptly, it will do so. Please make allowances to be on time—especially for unfamiliar meeting sites.

6) Do not leave the group to jump ahead. Jumping ahead of the group to another scheduled trip stop is inconsiderate of the efforts that the leader has taken to satisfy all participants, and often flushes target birds before others can see them.

WESTERN TANAGER
Published 10 times a year by
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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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.

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

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

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
213 876-7609 - fax
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 90046-6694.

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

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

C A L E N D A R

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

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

January 12 - Moose Peterson—*Madonnas of the Feathered World*. Join eminent wildlife research photographer Moose Peterson for this stunning multi-media presentation on avian breeding biology. All species of birds have different strategies to successfully raise their young. *Madonnas of the Feathered World* examines the Allen's Hummingbird, Peregrine Falcon and Killdeer, three species with three very different ways of raising young.

ID Workshop: Jonathan Alderfer - Winter Loons of Southern California

February 9 - Members' Annual Slide Contest. A perennial favorite, this event brings out the art critic and art lover in all of us. Bring your friends... boo the judges... cheer your favorites. Photos must be of wild, unrestrained birds only. Submit up to five (5) 35mm slides per photographer, with a dot in the upper-right corner (for placement in slide tray) and your name and phone number on each slide. All participants **must** be present at the show to accept their honors and divulge their winning technique (or good fortune). Bookstore gift certificates to all winners.

Due to the time required to set up the slide contest, there will be no ID Workshop this evening. Slide contest participants: please be present with your submissions no later than 7:45 p.m.

Sunday, January 3 - 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. \$5 parking fee. (LA, p.109, D-4)

Saturday, January 9 - Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Join Ed Craven at 8:00 a.m. to see wintering birds including renowned waterfowl. Meet 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)

Saturday, January 9 - Santa Barbara Area. Leader Shawneen Finnegan. Perennially, a good winter birding area. Christmas Count stake-outs may liven up the bird list. Participants limited to 15. Fee \$5. Reserve with LAAS to learn 8:00 a.m. meeting place. Bring lunch and rain gear. Heavy rain cancels.

Friday, January 15 - Raptor Workshop Lecture. Speaker Ned Harris. This lecture/field trip series is the best thing LAAS offers for raptor lovers. Fee \$10 for lecture only. The lecture will be 7:30-10:30 p.m. at the Union Federal Savings meeting room at 8485 Wilshire Blvd. (LA, p.42, E-2)

Saturday, January 16 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. Primarily an "old California" native grassland habitat with a large body of water and oak riparian woodlands in the adjacent arroyos. Geese, raptors and other wintering and sedentary birds. Finish up early afternoon. Take the 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 7:30 a.m. Bring lunch and water. No restrooms. (LA, p.6, A-6)

Sunday, January 17 - Antelope Valley Bus Trip. Leader Ned Harris. Given in conjunction with January 15 lecture. Fee \$15 for bus trip only. Leave promptly at 7:30 a.m. Meet in the Valley near 5/210 Fwy interchange. Sign-up with LAAS for exact directions.

F I E L D T R I P S

CALL THE TAPE!

Before setting out on any field trip, call the Audubon bird tape at (213) 874-1318 for special instructions or possible cancellations that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip. Bring appropriate food and clothing. No pets.

Notations in parentheses after trip listings refer to pre-1992 Thomas Bros. map page and grid coordinates (county, page number, grid coordinates).

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