



WESTERN TANAGER

The Los Angeles Chapter of
The National Audubon Society

Volume 59

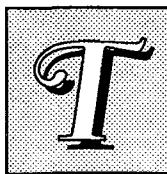
Number 6

March 1993

Vine; Vidi, Vici!

by James

From 35,000 feet up, Rangiroa looks like a dazzling white bracelet set in the blue ocean.



he stack of travel brochures had gradually diminished to a pile less than a foot high. Casually leafing through the stack, she suggested, "How about Tahiti? Qantas is having a special in September that includes Tahiti and Rangiroa," she continued. "And it would give us a chance to shoot the Pass."

"The Rangiroa Pass," she read, "is about three hundred yards wide, eighty feet deep and courses about a mile into the lagoon inside. With each change of tide, an avalanche of water surges through the narrow slot. The ebb tide carries with it an abundance of

sea organisms from the lagoon providing an endless food supply for an unbelievable assortment of sea life. It is thus small wonder that fish of every size and species have taken up permanent residence here, finding no need to forage in the open sea.

"Nowhere else in the world have I seen such a concentration of sharks. The Tuamotus (Treacherous Islands) are aptly named, and the Rangiroa Pass is the most dangerous diving in French Polynesia if not the world. The current often reaches ten knots against which a swimmer is helpless; small boats are hazarded by eddies and whirlpools."

Rangiroa is by far the largest atoll

in the Tuamotu Archipelago, which is distinguished from the Marquesas and Society Islands by being a low coral atoll rather than a mountainous or "high" island. The consequent vegetation has had a significant effect on the avifauna.

"Shooting the Pass" is a function of the tide, and fortunately (for me) we arrived in Rangiroa at the optimum time to miss the change of tide. I shudder to think what we were missing! We had a quick lunch at the Kia Ora Hotel and took an "indoctrination" cruise to the nearby village of Tiputa.

My roving eye spotted the office of the mayor, but though Karen and I

shouted at the top of our lungs, we were unable to raise anyone... despite the fact that the office was wide open and papers were everywhere. Had there been any bodies in place, it would have resembled Mount Vesuvius when they exhumed it. All that was missing were the humans! But at the post office we struck pay dirt.

"*Bon jour, monsieur,*" the lady postmaster greeted me.

"*Parlez-vous anglais?*" I tried.

Of course she didn't speak English, but when I asked her about "*les oiseaux*" a distant ember glowed somewhere in the dark recesses of her brain.

"*Moment, s'il vous plaît,*" she exclaimed and disappeared into an adjoining office. She reappeared moments later and dumped a pile of stamps on the counter.

Stamps? Ah, but what stamps. Bird stamps! Stamps with illustrations of all the quest birds of French Polynesia.

The first one I saw was unmistakable—the Blue Lorikeet. *Vini peruviana!*

"*Est-ce que vous connaissez cette oiseaux?*" I asked, pointing to the beautifully illustrated *psitticine*.

"*Vini? Mais oui*" was her immediate reply.

My pulse quickened.

"Is it nearby?"

"*Ah, non, monsieur. C'est très loin!*"

I wasn't sure just how far "*très loin*" was, especially on an atoll with a circumference of 225 kilometers, but it certainly wasn't very encouraging.

"They occasionally occur at Avatoru Village about eight kilometers from your hotel," she added, "but I haven't seen them recently."

That completed the afternoon question-and-answer session. We had hardly landed and gotten settled, and I had learned (or so I thought) the location of the rare *psitticine*—despite my atrocious French.

At 5:45 the following morning, I

bicycled past the airport toward Avatoru Village. I won't comment on the bicycle—except to say that it was single gear basic transportation. Thank God these atolls are literally at sea "level." But the hotel furnished them to guests for nothing, so at least the price was right! And especially in French Polynesia!

I heard an unknown call coming from a palm grove about 50 feet in from the road and, hiding the bike behind a large Tou tree, made my way toward the source of the singing. My first impression was that of a mockingbird that got stuck on the first or second phrase. It was a strong call—the kind that mimids and wrens do so well and that records beautifully.

I eventually reached a small clearing where a lone coconut palm dominated the scene. On a high palm frond was a "large" bird singing its head off. I say large because it reminded me more of a thrush or a mimid than a warbler. It was the Tuamotu Reed-Warbler, but who dug up the name reed-warbler is a complete mystery to me. The bird was sitting 30 feet up in a coconut palm, and there is nothing resembling a reed in this part of Polynesia—least of all on these low coral atolls.

There are 33 currently recognized species in the genus *Acrocephalus*, 20 of which are called "reed-warbler." The others bear such diverse names as Paddyfield Warbler, Aquatic Warbler, Millerbird, and four members of the genus are called swamp-warblers. I find it hard to fathom why someone would label this bird a reed-warbler.

The time spent on the warbler precluded any further search for the lorikeet, so I hightailed it back for breakfast and our 9 a.m. scheduled departure for the Blue Lagoon in a tiny, forlorn 16-foot "butt-buster."

We headed more or less southwest for two hours, with a snorkeling stop at

"Bird Island" enroute. The island takes its name from a single White Tern that once nested there. But aside from a lone Wandering Tattler and two frigatebirds that flew over, the minuscule islet seemed hopelessly misnamed.

The wind was quite brisk, and I was curious how the flat-bottom boat would handle in the open areas of the lagoon. The wind was almost on the nose, but since the square-bow boat was not blessed with anything as efficient as a nose, we took each wave as though someone was beating on us with a sledge hammer. And the driver had only one speed—throttle full forward! The pounding of the sledgehammers varied from a dull thud to a bone-jarring explosion.

Karen was so concerned about my hip that in desperation she had the boatman momentarily stop his mad dash across the lagoon so I could move aft to a less vulnerable position.

While this position turned out to be better on my titanium hip implant, it now placed me right in the teeth of the incoming spray. We weren't underway ten seconds when I was drenched, and the constant stream of salt water coursing over me made any attempt at visibility impossible. The only position I could tolerate was with my sun visor pulled down over my ears and my head buried in my lap. It wasn't what I would call the scenic crossing, but it worked.

I had just finished reading about maritime disasters in Willard Bascom's classic *Waves and Beaches*, and visions of the Neptune Sapphire minus her bow and other famous maritime wrecks danced through my mind. Each time a particularly hard crash reverberated through the puny craft, the parade of over 6,000 boats that had vanished in historical times flashed through my mind. I only wished our boatman could have read Willard's admonition regarding speed.

"Captains do not like to encounter

waves head on and they generally reduce speed if encountering large head seas. The reason, of course, is that the force of impact increases as the square of the velocity of the collision between ship and wave."

But how the hell was an illiterate Tahitian boatman supposed to have mastered Dr. Bascom's laws of nautical velocity? He might have worried about them if he had finished reading the chapter, instead of quitting when the mathematics got rough.

All good things must come to an end, and after an hour and a half of this unmerciful pounding, the two outboards were reduced to idle and our sadistic aquatic Barney Oldfield pulled quietly into the Blue Lagoon.

But if they misnamed Bird Island, they certainly got Blue Lagoon right. It was the most dazzling turquoise imaginable—set in an already incredible blue expanse. A blue lagoon within a blue lagoon!

The coral reef that makes up the *motu* rises precipitously from the deep waters of the Rangiroa lagoon, forming a steep wall for your snorkeling pleasure. But the real joys of this area are the *motus*, small coral atolls separated by shallow channels some 50 to 100 yards wide. While the two boatmen prepared lunch, we explored the nearby *motus*, and at the third one we hit the jackpot.

I heard an unfamiliar call coming from deep inside the *motu*, and Karen and I started in to investigate the sound. We hadn't gone more than 50 yards when a movement high in a nearby coconut palm caught my attention.

I got my binoculars on the bird and focused on the white bib and red bill of the Blue Lorikeet. *Veni, Vidi, Vici!* I came, I saw, I conquered! Karen and I

watched the bird for 15 minutes and later saw a pair circling and flying through the canopy.

We were next treated to a feeding display by three Bristle-thighed Curlews—cavorting and dancing along the reef in pursuit of some favored morsel... flashing their golden rumps and tails in the glistening sunlight. This



curlew breeds in Alaska, but my fondest memories of this bird have been on these remote Pacific islands.

But if I thought that "Vini" was to be the *pièce de résistance*, I was greatly mistaken. The boatman had told me that "U'Upa" (Atoll Fruit-Dove) could be commonly found along these coral atolls.

We returned by the opposite side of the second *motu*, and in crossing a decomposed coral shelf adjacent to the shore, a small sandpiper flew up in front of me. The heavy barring below was immediately diagnostic. Another quest bird of the trip—the Tuamotu Sandpiper—was feeding nonchalantly 20 feet from me.

The Tuamotu Sandpiper in recent years has been confined to the more remote atolls in the archipelago. You can imagine my thrill at having a close encounter with this rare bird. Sheer dumb luck! As my brother Bob likes to say, you spend 12 to 14 hours a day in

the field and every time you see something rare or unusual, the hue and cry goes up... "That idiot lucked out again!"

On our final morning, at 6:15 a.m., I was delighted to see a fruit-dove fly across the road and perch about 20 feet up in a coconut palm. The bird seemed identical to *Ptilinopus purpuratus* that we had studied so closely in Tahiti, but this was the endemic Atoll Fruit-Dove, *Ptilinopus oralensis*.

The 51 members of the *Ptilinopus* genus are called fruit-doves, with the exception of the three forms from Fiji (Orange, Golden and Velvet Doves). The Tuamotu bird, despite its morphological similarity to the other Polynesian forms, is misnamed "fruit-

dove," since it is the only member of the genus that is not an obligate frugivore. It subsists on insects and seeds and is confined to the low lying coral atolls in the Tuamotu Archipelago where there are no fruiting trees.

Our return flight to Los Angeles lifted off the tarmac exactly on schedule. I was relaxing in my seat, thinking about the three weeks we had just spent on a few fly specks of land in the vast Pacific, when the cabin intercom came on interrupting my train of thought.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is your captain speaking. On the left side of the aircraft we are passing over Rangiroa, the largest coral atoll in the world."

I looked out my window, and from five miles up Rangiroa looked like a dazzling white bracelet set in the blue ocean.

It was exactly 9 a.m., and I silently wondered if the lone Tuamotu Reed-Warbler had attracted a mate yet with his vigorous singing. 

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

As we step gingerly into the environmental bog of '93, perhaps it's time for a brief overview of the local scene...

Ballona Wetlands: The fond dreams for rejuvenation of the once-teeming wetlands in Playa del Rey are still alive but far from well. Maguire Thomas Partners (MTP), the developer of the gigantic city-within-a-city, Playa Vista, has yet to turn a shovelful of earth. MTP has agreed to save approximately 280 acres of wetlands and has promised \$10 million for restoration. They have also been very supportive of National Audubon's Education Office which has an environmental program in the wetlands for grade school children.

The Draft Environmental Impact Report for Playa Vista was recently released but ran into a buzzsaw of opposition. Though the original plans for the project have been cut back considerably, neighbors are still concerned about traffic gridlock and air and visual pollution. Environmental groups such as Heal The Bay and the Sierra Club Clean Water Task Force are worried about urban runoff from the vast development. Dust and hazardous material dispersal in the construction process could pose potentially serious problems. The district councilwoman, Ruth Galanter, is dissatisfied with the proposed mitigation of the adverse impacts. MTP will respond to the criticism in a final Environmental Impact Report. In the meantime, the wetlands are without an adequate supply of salt water, and the marsh and wildlife are suffering. And so it goes.

Los Angeles River, Sepulveda: The L.A. River is a 60-mile artery that makes

its serpentine way from Canoga Park through the City of Los Angeles and down to the sea at Long Beach. Most of the year it is a rather feeble ribbon of water in the West Valley that picks up street runoff in its rigid concrete trough. Winter rains can make it an astonishing torrent, and most of us remember well the awesome flood that stranded motorists in the Sepulveda Basin last year. For the surprising variety of birds along the full course of the river, re-read Kimball Garrett's excellent report in the Jan/Feb '93 *Tanager*.

In Sepulveda, the river has an unlined, soft bottom that promotes the growth of luxurious riparian vegetation. This welcome greenery, though not all native, provides a fine habitat for ducks, grebes, egrets, herons and several species of fish. Blue Grosbeaks nest in the willows along the river, perhaps in greater numbers than in any other part of the city. Migrating songbirds, spring and fall, feed in the trees and shrubs as they pause to build up their fat to resume their long journey.

A plan is in the works to transform much of the river from its concrete bleakness to a greenbelt with hiking trails, bike-ways and other amenities. In Sepulveda, a part of the river is to be an experimental pilot project for the rest of the waterway. There has been talk of removing some of the vegetation to allow trails to be built on the banks of the river and to clear and widen this stretch of water to accommodate a canoe instruction area. Most of the environmentalists involved opposed this plan for its inevitable effect on wildlife. It is fervently hoped that the canoe scenario will be eliminated from the plan and the integrity of this small, successful segment

of the river remains undisturbed.

Tujunga Wash: You may have heard of the absurd project to build a golf course in the Tujunga Wash. A Japanese company, Cosmo World (now there's an exciting intergalactic label for you), owns a big piece of property that borders the wash near the Foothill Freeway in Sunland. This is slated to be a private golf course for 500 affluent members, and the owners are hoping to lure the L.A. Open tournament from the Riviera Country Club. Cosmo is the same outfit that brought the elegant Pebble Beach Golf Course a few years ago; shortly afterward, it went belly up. Similar projects were built in Nevada and Hawaii, and they too slid down the tubes.

At a hearing in September, residents and a phalanx of real estate brokers argued for the project, apparently with the expectation that property values would zoom. The company's spokesman said that, "People in the golf business are environmentalists." When the green grass fairways replace that dull gray alluvial scrub in the wash, he said, it will help alleviate air pollution by "rexygenating the air."

The Sierra Club and Audubon argued that alluvial scrub was a rare and dwindling desert ecosystem that supports many threatened plants and animals. The slender-horned spineflower that occurs there is on the federal endangered species list. Cactus Wren and Lesser Nighthawk (in summer) are common birds, and a lone male Least Bell's Vireo hung around for weeks last year calling wistfully for a female. On the face of it, destroying a big chunk of a successful ancient habitat for a golf course is

nuts! There will be a hearing before the full Planning Commission in April or May. Stay tuned for further details.

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife: The endless saga of wildlife and its supporters in the Sepulveda Basin continues. This time onward and upward. Sandwiched between two bureaucracies—Army Corps of Engineers and L.A. Recreation and Parks Department—the small body of the faithful has been plugging away over the years to restore the 2100-acre flood control basin to its former glory as a thriving arena for wild creatures. Though the 109-acre Wildlife Reserve has an 11-acre lake, there has not been money, expertise or dedication in the agencies to improve the surrounding habitat.

Through luck and the bold efforts of Bill Principe, LAAS was able to get an award of \$82,500 from an electroplating company that had dumped hazardous chemicals into the city sewer system. Part of that money is going to fund an environmental education program for public school children in the Reserve. This is being put together by Melanie Ingalls of National Audubon's Education Office. The program will begin this March. A year after the first spill, a nearby Anheuser-Busch plant accidentally spilled caustic soda into a creek that borders the Wildlife Reserve. This resulted in a \$98,000 fine that went to the "Audubon Consortium." The Consortium (designated by the Regional Water Quality Board) is com-

posed of environmental organizations with representatives from the Sierra Club, San Fernando Valley Audubon, LAAS, TreePeople, California Native Plant Society, Friends of the River and the Save Sepulveda Basin Coalition. Committees have been formed and work is underway to spend the money and reclaim as much of the basin as possible for wildlife. Beside the Reserve, the tributary creeks that flow into the river and areas as yet undeveloped are possible targets for wildlife enhancement.

Proposition A—unexpectedly approved by 55% of the voters—is a bond issue that sets aside \$1.8 million for Sepulveda wildlife. Things are definitely looking up! 

An Unsavory Sighting: Common Goons

It may serve us well from time to time to unglue ourselves from our binocular eye pieces, step back from our spotting scopes, and cast a sidelong glance of appraisal at a familiar but under-examined species — our own. While such an exercise is likely to do little more than remind us that yes, there are others just as obsessed as ourselves in their pursuit of birds, it can sometimes reveal conduct that demands our immediate attention and collective outcry.

Take an incident that occurred in Lancaster around the beginning of the new year. Tire tracks

that scarred the A & G Sod Farm were no accident but the work of birders. Specifically, birders who could care less about private property or people's livelihoods.

We who go about our pastime in a principled manner hold those who ignore ethics in the field accountable for their actions. While they may think of themselves as birders, we know their methods are about as akin to the spirit of birding as drift nets are to flyfishing.

Future offenders take heed. We'll be watching for you.

Lens View

by Herb Clarke

Because there is widespread confusion among photographers as to the use of filters and hoods on lenses in nature photography, I have been asked for my opinion as to their necessity. Based on experience, it all boils down to personal taste as to what types are needed and when to use them.

Assuming that readers of this column use mostly color film, be it for slides or prints, I will concentrate this discussion on those filters appropriate for this purpose.

Perhaps the most common use of a filter is to protect the front element of the lens from dust, finger smudges, moisture, scratches and so on. Best for protection are clear glass, ultraviolet (UV), and skylight. As with all photographic gear, buy the finest quality you are comfortable with. Stay with name brands, and make sure filters are large enough to avoid darkening corners of your pictures (called vignetting). I prefer clear glass or UV types which do not appreciably alter color balance. Skylight filters impart a pink cast which helps overcome excessive bluishness of photos taken on overcast days or in shadows of some scenes. None of these filters significantly affect exposure.

There are those who think that an additional element should never be placed in front of a fine, expensive lens on the possibility of degrading images. I have mixed emotions about this. I keep filters on my smaller lenses, sometimes removing them for critical work. Frankly, I have difficulty in detecting any difference in my pictures taken with or without a protective filter, but I do feel better having these extra lens safeguards along

with regular lens caps.

The next most popular filter is the polarizer. A polarizing filter is used to increase color saturation, reduce haze, enhance blue sky and eliminate unwanted reflections from shiny surfaces. All these attributes may seem desirable, but restrained use is recommended to avoid unwanted exaggerated results. This filter is adjustable, and resulting color intensity depends on sun angle and lighting characteristics of the scene. Bracketing with various filter settings and exposure is advisable. This is basically a device for scenics and should not be used for bird portraiture.

There are two kinds of polarizers. A linear polarizer can reduce exposures up to two stops and is not compatible with the camera's light meter. Instead, use the second type polarizing filter, called circular, which also reduces exposure but does not adversely affect meter operation.

There are a variety of filters used to emphasize certain colors and graduated neutral density ones for controlling high-contrast situations and still others for precise creativity. Sometimes different filters are mounted in tandem for special effects.

Summing up this discussion, filters are not required for general nature photography, especially bird photography. I rarely use them except for limited lens protection.

Proper use of a lens hood is another minor issue. It's always a good idea to photograph with a lens hood attached. This helps prevent stray light from striking the front lens element, which can reduce image contrast and color saturation, especially a problem when aiming toward the sun or other light source. Long focus lenses usually come with hoods either permanently attached or easily installed. Smaller lenses often do not come with a hood or have ones which are detachable and either snap on or bayonet into the front rings. In these cases, I prefer to use replacement screw in collapsible rubber hoods which can be left in place. Hoods are only marginally useful with wide angle lenses because of the spread re-

Empidonax absurdus

by Glenn Cunningham

For habits absurd on the part of a bird
With the Buff-breasted Flycatcher no other vies.
I cannot see why it prefers such a diet—
It must be a job to find buff-breasted flies!

quired to prevent vignetting.

Supplementary lenses are single optical glass elements of different magnifications contained in threaded metal rings. While not considered filters, these devices are mounted the same way, that is, screwed into fronts of lenses. This is an easy, convenient way to increase power and close-up range of a small, regular lens. Exposure and color are not seriously affected, when used properly, especially with good-quality brands. However, they are not substitutes for longer lenses. Other advantages are relatively low cost, compactness and the flexibility of using up to three at a time. They are helpful in getting tight shots of fairly small objects such as flowers and insects. 

SPECIAL PROGRAM

Birds and Biogeography in the Realm of the Russian Bear

Dr. Nicolai Drozdov, one of Russia's foremost ornithologists, will present an illustrated lecture on Sunday, April 4, 1993 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. Dr. Drozdov is the writer and co-host of the highly acclaimed PBS Nature Series: *Realms of the Russian Bear*. The event is co-sponsored by the Los Angeles and Santa Monica Audubon Societies in cooperation with the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

Tickets are \$5 for members of Audubon or LACMNH; \$7 for non-members. For reservations, call the Natural History Museum at (213) 744-3534 or write: Education Division, 900 Exposition Blvd.; Los Angeles, CA 90007; Attn: Trina Duke. 

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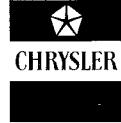
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Birdathon '92 – JAPAN

by Charles Harper

May 1, 1992. My Big Day begins like most others: very early in the morning. As I awake in the darkness, I hear a crow cawing, but I cannot count it yet. We have two species here, and they sound the same to me. I will see both later, though.

Japan's main travel arteries are not highways but railway tracks, so I have decided that a "big day count via public transportation" might be an appropriate challenge. That is the manner in which much of our birding is done here, and I know its frustrations. But I thought this might be an opportunity to test its parameters: how far could I get? how much would it cost? how much time would be spent travelling compared to actual birding? and of course, how many species might I see?

I have plotted a course via three good birding spots in my area (Fujisawa, a city of 350,000 about 50 kilometers south of Tokyo) which I hope will give optimal birding value for travel time: (1) a small forested mountain named Komayama, (2) a sandbar and little lagoon at the Sagami River mouth, and (3) some riverine parkland and farmlands several miles up the same river.

And now at five a.m., as I walk to the local train station through our sleeping suburb of Mutsuai, I begin the day with the pest birds—Carrión Crows, Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Rufous Turtle Doves, Gray Starlings and Brown-eared Bulbuls. (It is interesting to note the equivalence to Los Angeles' urban birds—the bulbul replacing perhaps the mockingbird, niche-wise). When the first morning

train arrives, I have eleven species.

After an hour, two trains and a taxi, I am standing in front of Takaku Shrine at the foot of Komayama, tossing a few propitiatory yen into the collection box and striking the gong to awaken the god within; I want his blessing for a fruitful birdathon. Komayama is one of many isolated hills, usually sanctified by a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple—and too steep to build on!—which project as small green knobs above the urban congestion of the Kanto Plain and survive as parks to sustain the fragile populations of forest birds in the Tokyo area.

A Japanese morning is filled with mysterious birdsong for me, and I surely miss several vocal but well-hidden species on my way up the steep trail that ascends from behind the shrine. But the woods still hold delights. Today, Indian Tree Pipits and Brown Thrushes are migrating through, and the trees rustle continuously with their movement as if they constituted the theme for the day. Reaching the hilltop at 10 a.m., I add the 27th species: the morning sunlight overhead is flickering with White-rumped Swifts.

From the top of Komayama I take a bus back down, a train, then another bus, moving more slowly now as traffic thickens, and just before noon I reach the Sagami River mouth emptying into its bay. Sagami Bay is where the Emperor, a trained marine biologist, did much of his research, and this lagoon is still a well-known birding site; but the small and dirty backwater that is yet "undeveloped" here is only an unhappy remnant of what might once have been a fine staging area for shorebirds. Today its memory seems still strong enough in avian genes to draw a few bewildered representatives of nine species, and they nervously pace the far edge of a puddle now little larger than a California swimming pool.

The foreshore dunes are bulkwarked by precast concrete slabs and planted with a sturdy succulent which is effervescently hatched insects into the warmth of the afternoon, and the air above swarms with Barn Swallows, House Martins, Red-rumped Swallows and White-rumped Swifts, so that I get dizzy assuring myself that I have counted all the species criss-crossing themselves. The 46th species of the day is a Japanese Wagtail, the most handsome of the family and a popular endemic, which stands bobbing magisterially at the edge of the breakwater. The bay itself is virtually devoid of seabirds. Why, I do not know.

Next I work my way upriver by train (with a brief pause at a stand-up stall for a bowl of noodles), and at three p.m. I reach Sobudaishita, a tiny station in an agricultural stretch of the Sagami River, where rice fields and truck gardens hug its course as a source of cheap irrigation. The wintering ducks I was hoping for are gone, but the two common marsh songbirds, Great Reed-Warblers and Fan-tailed Cisticolas, have recently returned and are raucous in the reedbeds, while the Long-billed Plovers are defending territory on the cobbled shingle of the riverbed.

A Japanese river is a mixed blessing for a birder. For much of its length, a generous undeveloped corridor is usually provided, but this allowance is in high recreational demand, and on a fine day like today the banks and trails are busy with fishermen and cyclists, kids and kites, golfers, picnickers, dirt-bikers and model-airplane enthusiasts. Riverbanks are also a playland for urban adventurers in the ORVs. So the time to bird here is early in the morning; notwithstanding, I add eight more species before I should start homeward.

Three trains later, I am back at Mutsuai, with time to take the scenic

walk home through the variegated campus of Nippon University's Agricultural and Veterinary College. This is always a pleasant place to bird, but I expect to find nothing new for the day. Still, I add the last two species: a Common Snipe and a Little Ringed Plover, in the fields where the livestock manure from the barns is spread to dry—a great breeding ground for insects and so a great attraction for birds.

I get home just after six, I and the light both fading fast. The statistics? Total species, 56; total trains, 7; total buses, 2; total taxis, 1. Total fares, ¥2700 (about \$20). Total time, 13 hours, of which birding comprised 6½ hours, travelling 3½ hours, and waiting for trains or buses, 3 hours!

The species are all common and represent a typical day's birding here at this season. No lifers, but 13 for the year list. Six species are endemic or near-endemic. At this date, the wintering ducks and passerines have gone for the most part, and only the earliest breeding migrants have appeared, shorebirds were the dominant feature of the day.

Travel costs are less than I anticipated—no more than I would have spent on gas if I had driven the L.A. Birdathon. But the proportion of time spent travelling is shocking—fully half the birding day! That could be the case in southern California, too, for instance if I were driving the Big Bear/Salton Sea/San Diego loop—but there I can travel and bird at the same time; here I have to perch impatiently on a train seat and stare at the dour commuters opposite me.

Still, the day was beautiful, the birds fascinating, and the experience irreplaceable. For next Birdathon, I have thought of some changes to my route and schedule. I'll let you know how it works out. Meanwhile, I challenge anyone to compile a more exotic list for 1993 L.A. Birdathon! 



Birds of Southern California Wetlands

Paintings by Jonathan Alderfer

March 28 - May 7, 1993

An exhibition of original artwork used to illustrate Audubon's new young people's guides to local birdlife. The guides, published by the National Audubon Society's Education Division office in Los Angeles, will complement the outdoor education programs at the Ballona Wetlands, the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area, and the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine.

Also on exhibit, some recent paintings and prints.

Book signing and reception for the artist

Sunday, March 28, 1993

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

National Audubon Society

200 Culver Boulevard

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Gallery hours 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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Birds Of The Season

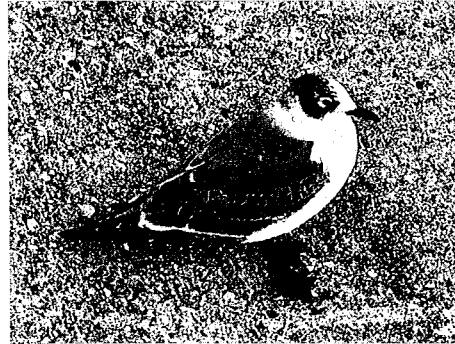
by Hank Brodkin

March will find us well into spring migration. By February, swallows and migrant hummingbirds will have already started showing up along with White-fronted Geese that wintered in Mexico. March will bring orioles and some flycatchers. Our chaparral and lower deserts should be flowering (thanks to the recent downpours), and Southern California at its best will welcome the birder. So please keep an eye open for the first of the migrants—both *American Birds* and this column like to publish the first sightings of the season.

The most exciting find by far on the recent Christmas Counts was L.A. County's first LeConte's Sparrow found at Malibu Creek State Park by Scott Harris (who originally thought that this bright but secretive individual might be the similar Sharp-tailed). This bird was still present as of 17 January.

A Red-necked Grebe was in the surf at Malibu on 4 January (Barbara Elliott). An immature Little Blue Heron—probably the first Kern County record—was found in California City on 19 December (Matt Heindel), and an impressive flock of 70 Cattle Egrets (the "Common Starling" of the heron family) was on the Oxnard Plain on 6 December (David Koeppel).

A "Common" Teal, the Eurasian race of our Green-winged, showed up at Sepulveda Basin on 11 January (Harold Swanton), and another Eurasian wanderer, a Common Pochard, returned for the third consecutive year to Silver Lakes near Helendale in San Bernardino County on 26 November



Franklin's Gull by Ned Harris

(Mike Patten). An Oldsquaw (Jim Pike), a White-winged Scoter and a Common Goldeneye (Tom Williams) were at Seal Beach on 13 December.

Two Bald Eagles were observed at Lake Henshaw on 29 November (John Levine), and an immature Peregrine Falcon was seen at Malibu Lagoon on 2 January (Mike San Miguel).

A Franklin's Gull was found at the L.A. River at Willow Street on 22 December (Kevin Larsen). A flock of 40 to 50 Mountain Plover were found east of Lancaster on 28 November (Wanda Dameron, Phil Sayre, Jean Brandt), and a late Solitary Sandpiper was at Newport Back Bay on 26 November (Irwin Woldman).

Seven Short-eared Owls—a bird now rarely seen in southern California—were at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area in Riverside County.

The county's second Dusky-capped Flycatcher was found at Huntington Gardens on 13 December (Kimball Garrett), and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher turned up at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in El Monte on 6 December (Joanne Getze).

Hansen Dam had a Prairie, two Black-and-White and two Hooded Warblers on 21 November (Dustin Alcala).

A White-throated Sparrow was at Forest Lawn, Glendale, on 16 January (KG), and a Harris' Sparrow was found in Big Pine, Inyo County, on 27 November (Howard King). A "Baltimore" Northern Oriole was in Carson on 20 December (Martin Byhower and Laurie Conrad).



Every once in a while a natural history book comes along that just (pardon the cliche) knocks my socks off. This Christmas I was given a copy of *The Ants* by Bert Holldobler and Edward O. Wilson. This Pulitzer Prize-winning book should especially be put in the hands of young people who show an interest in the natural world. Although birds are barely mentioned, this fascinating book should appeal to all of you!

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to Bill Principe, whose electronic wizardry has contributed many of the sightings to this column for the past few issues.

Good Birding!

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

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

FIELD TRIPS

Continued from Page 12

extensive familiarity with mammals and birds and with the zoo should make this a memorable outing. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the main gate, picnic or buy lunch, continue into the afternoon if you like. Binoculars work well at the zoo. Zoo fees: adults \$5-7, children \$2-3, depending on group size.

Sunday, April 4 - Topanga State Park. Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 a.m. First Sunday each month. See March 7 write-up for details.

Saturday, April 10 - Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader Dustin Alcala. Meet at 7:30 a.m. See March 13 write-up for details.

Saturday, April 17 - Whittier Narrows. Leader Bill Principe. Meet at 8:00 a.m. Not second Saturday this month. See March 13 write-up for details.

Sunday, April 18 - O'Melveny Park. Leader Fred Machetanz. Migration should be getting underway. Take the 405 or 5 Fwy N to the 118 Fwy W to Balboa Blvd. Head N a couple miles to Sesson Blvd. and take a left into the park. Drive through the gate into the lot; meet at the far end of the lot at 7:30 a.m.

Friday, April 23 - Chatsworth Park
South. Join leader Allan Keller for a morning of prime migration birding. Take Topanga Canyon Blvd. (from 101 or 118 Fwy's), go W on Devonshire and continue into lot by Recreation Center. Meet at 8:00 a.m. (LA, p.6, B-2)

Saturday, April 24 - Grass Mountain Area. Leader Doug Martin will be touring the wilds of the Santa Susana Mountains. Possible Pygmy Owl. Meet at Denny's near the 5 Fwy and Roxford in Sylmar at 7:30 a.m. Look for additional details in next month's *Tanager*.

Sunday, April 25 - Starr Ranch Sanctuary. Meet Park Ranger Pete DeSimone at 8:30 a.m. Reserve by phone with Audubon House. No fee. Look for additional details in next month's *Tanager*.

Friday, May 7 through Sunday, May 9 - Owl Workshop. Presented by Steven Laymon et al. Send SASE to LAAS for itinerary. Fee approximately \$95. Look for additional details in next month's *Tanager*.

Saturday, April 3 - Bird, blossom & butterfly bonanza. Fred Heath leads in Antelope Valley all day. Hwy. 14 to Lamont Odett overlook 7:30 a.m.

PELAGIC TRIPS

Trips Aboard the Vantuna out of Los Angeles Harbor

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.

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.

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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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.

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 Tuesday - Saturday
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 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.

March 9 – Dr. Jonathan Atwood – *The California Gnatcatcher: Conservation in an Urban Environment*. Dr. Atwood's doctoral dissertation provided the scientific bases for the "split" of the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher complex. Having recently attained full species status, the northern races of *P. californica* are now rapidly disappearing along with their coastal sage scrub habitat. This illustrated presentation will provide a close-up look at these diminutive songbirds and the outlook for their future. Dr. Atwood is a member of the staff of the Manomet Bird Observatory in Maine.

ID Workshop: Kimball Garrett – *Fox Sparrow Identification: How many species?*

April 13 – Ty Garrison – *You Can't Get There From Here: The Nature and Importance of Habitat Linkages*. Mr. Garrison will present an illustrated talk on the increasingly vital ecological links in the southern California region.

ID Workshop: Larry Allen – Topic TBA.

405 Fwy N to Roscoe Blvd., head W to Fallbrook Ave., go 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, March 14 – **Franklin Canyon**. Leader Steve Saffier. Franklin Canyon is located between Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 100 species have been seen in the chaparral, lakeside and oak/pine woodland habitats of the canyon. Meet at the Sooky Goldman Nature Center lot at 7:30 a.m. From the 101 Fwy in the Valley, take Coldwater S into the hills, make a 90° right turn at the ridge onto Franklin Canyon Dr., and continue $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the Nature Center. The lot is past a gate designating the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom. (LA, p.23, B-6)

Saturday and Sunday, March 20 and 21 – **Owens Valley Grouse Trip**. Mary Carmona will orchestrate this road-intensive weekend. Sunday morning we will meet very early. Rosy Finches, Sage Grouse, Blue Grouse, Sage Thrashers, Piñon 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. Saturday Big Pine meeting location and lodging list.

Sunday, March 21 – **Los Angeles County Arboretum**. Barbara Cohen will lead this morning walk through varied habitat in anticipation of the first days of spring. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in front of the gatehouse in the parking lot on Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia, just south of the 210 Fwy, on the west side of the street. Possible fee: adults \$3.00; students and seniors \$1.50. (LA, p.28, C-4)

F I E L D T R I P S

CALL THE TAPE!

Before setting out on any field trip, call the Audubon bird tape at (213) 874-1318 for special instructions or possible cancellations that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip. Notations in parentheses after trip listings refer to pre-1992 Thomas Bros. map page and grid coordinates (county, page number, grid coordinates).

Saturday, March 6 - **Ventura County Game Preserve**. Leaders Dustin Alcala and Doug Martin. 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**. 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, March 13 - **Whittier Narrows Regional Park**. Join Mary Carmona at 8:00 a.m. to see wintering birds including waterfowl. Meet at the Nature Center at 1000 Durfee Ave. Take the 60 Fwy to South El Monte, just west 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, March 13 - **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 by early afternoon. Take the

 **Saturday, March 27** - **Malibu and Point Dume**. Leader Irwin Woldman. We should see gulls molting into breeding plumages, sandpipers on the move, and seabirds such as loons and scoters heading north. Meet at the Malibu Lagoon parking lot kiosk at 8:00 a.m. Free parking on Cross Creek Rd. located just west of lagoon bridge. We will carpool at Point Dume to minimize possible parking fees. (LA, p.114, B-5)

Sunday, March 28 - **L.A. Zoo Tour**. Guy and Louise Commeau will be showing off the mammals and birds of our city's zoo. Their

(continued on Page 11)