

WESTERN TANAGER



Volume 60 Number 2 October 1993

Los Angeles Audubon Society

The Tricolored Blackbirds

at Mystic Lake

Kimball L. Garrett

In 1992 a colony containing an estimated 3,000 Tricolored Blackbirds was located at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) near Lakeview in Riverside County. The blackbirds foraged for several miles in all directions from the colony particularly to the east in highly productive "buggy" alfalfa and barley. The formation of the ephemeral Mystic Lake by the early spring rains in 1993 inundated and eliminated about 50 percent of the available foraging area during the nesting season. The lake at its maximum was six miles long and two miles wide. For the last several years, Mystic Lake didn't exist.

This paper describes what happened to this colony when an irregularly appearing lake covered half of its foraging area, and it discusses the implications of this event to the future of this rapidly declining species in California.

Background

A special, gaudy bird, the Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) resembles the Red-winged Blackbird (*A. phoeniceus*), but it has a far more interesting lifestyle. The two species are nearly identical in appearance, both blackbirds with red shoulder patches. (See your field guide). There are, however, dra-

by Henry E. Childs Jr., Ph.D.

matic differences between the lifestyles (= social structure) of the two species. Such differences are to be expected, as the ecological principle of competitive exclusion would dictate that two such similar species could not co-exist in the same niche.

The Red-winged Blackbird is the more familiar as it has a wider distribution. Redwings possess an all-purpose territory in which the male, during the breeding season, defends a plot of ground averaging 2,400 square feet (Orians, 1980). In it, the polygynous male and his harem of

two or more females find the resources they need, including most of their food, nest and roosting sites. Thus, the territory provides nearly all that this species needs to bring forth young successfully.

Tricolored Blackbirds are also territorial and polygynous but are colonial with some nesting colonies containing thousands of members. Their territories measure approximately 35 square feet (!) and provide nest sites and roosting areas only. The territory is located on and above the mat of old growth at the base of the cattails (Bent, 1958). The tops of the stems overhead are free territory and undefended by the male; other males may land there, just so long as they don't look down! All food is obtained some distance from the territory, and both sexes may travel over four miles and cover 30 square miles to obtain it (Orians, 1968).

In contrast to the several months of defending the large territory by the red-winged male, tricolored males only defend territory during the week when the female is receptive and eggs are being laid. This behavior has resulted in essentially synchronous timing of events of the nesting cycle by all members of the colony. These are basic and significant differences in the lifestyles of these two species.

The Colony

Located about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east of the SJWA headquarters on Davis Road, the colony under discussion occupied a triangular shaped cattail marsh (Marsh A) of about seven acres (see map). Red-winged Blackbirds occupied the border between marsh and upland vegetation to the west and south. A few Yellow-headed Blackbirds nested around the square ponds nearby. White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Virginia Rails, Marsh Wrens, Common Yellowthroats and Song Sparrows were also resident in the marsh.

In February and March the rains came and the water covered the cat-

tails in Marsh A to a height of 18 inches and, more importantly, a major portion of the foraging area of the colony.



Kimball L. Garrett

Male Tricolored Blackbird

Observations

I made weekly visits from late March to mid-June to the SJWA and to Marsh A. Neither species of blackbirds was seen until April 15 when one male tricolor flew overhead. Marsh A was deserted. The next week, April 22, again no blackbirds were in Marsh A. However, the flock had arrived and had occupied another, but smaller, marsh (Marsh B) of 2.4 acres in the area between square ponds 1 and 2, about 700 ft. to the northeast. Females were carrying nesting material, and nest construction was obviously underway.

The din and melee of the hundreds (thousands?) of birds in Marsh B was a delight to see and hear. Much of the activity could only be heard as it occurred deep in the cattails. Across the road to the west of Davis Road, a new and smaller colony (West Marsh) of several hundred birds was forming. This marsh consists of a narrow band (0.04 acre) of cattails along the water course of the old San Jacinto River. Dave Feliz, assistant manager of the SJWA, reported that this colony did not exist in 1992.

Nesting was underway in both

marshes, and I looked forward to seeing the streaming of the adults from the colony to the feeding grounds while feeding young in the following weeks. This phenomenon, in my view, is one of the most impressive bird behaviors to be seen in Southern California. However, it was not to be.

On April 29, numerous tricolors, mostly females, were flycatching above Marsh B and nest construction was continuing. Egg-laying appeared to have started. A few feeding flights were observed. Yellow-headed Blackbirds had arrived, were displaying and appeared restricted to the northern edge of the cattails. About 45 White-faced Ibis were also constructing nests in Marsh B.

The next day, Feliz (pers. comm.) reported the presence of many Brown-headed Cowbirds around Marsh B, apparently attracted by the nesting activity. This would seem to be a logical strategy for such a successful nest parasite, i.e., to be present at egg-laying and the incubation period of the host.

On May 8, little tricolor activity was seen at Marsh B. A few females were feeding on the mudflat to the north, and occasional small groups were flying to a feeding area to the northwest. Only a few cowbirds were present.

By May 15, no evidence of hatching was seen in Marsh B. The schedule should have been as follows: from April 22, a period of four days for nest building; five days for egg laying; and 12 days for incubation, a total of 21 days leading to hatching. This was day 23. There should have been some activity indicating feeding of the young. There wasn't any!

However, a new phenomenon was observed. Feeding flocks of a dozen or more birds were seen flying from West Marsh, over Marsh B and across the lake to the east, to an irrigated field of alfalfa and returning, a flight of more than two miles. In West Marsh, five nests with eggs were found. These nests

were about four feet above the surface of the water and were spaced about a foot apart! There was no mat of old vegetation as this was new growth of cattails.

The visit to Marsh B on May 22 was conclusive. The colony had been abandoned, except for a few individuals. In an hour's time, only two small feeding flocks were seen to approach from the west and enter Marsh B. Newly hatched young, however, were seen in the nests at West Marsh.

The Lake: March to June

The map shows the extent of the lake in March, 1993, and its boundary at the end of the study. At its maximum, cattails in Marsh A were in water to a depth of 18 inches, well up into the mat of last year's vegetation. By early May, Marsh A had drained through three openings in the berm along its southern edge and the substrate was drying. The lack of standing water in Marsh A opened access to reptile and mammal predators. The land below the berm dried off by late May, too late for much vegetational growth.

Similarly, Marsh B was inundated by water that poured over the berm. It, however, did not drain and there was standing water in the cattails at the end of the study. Because of the timing of flooding and drying, I assume that the flooding of the cattails was of no significance in the shift of the colony from Marsh A to Marsh B.

Loss of Foraging Areas

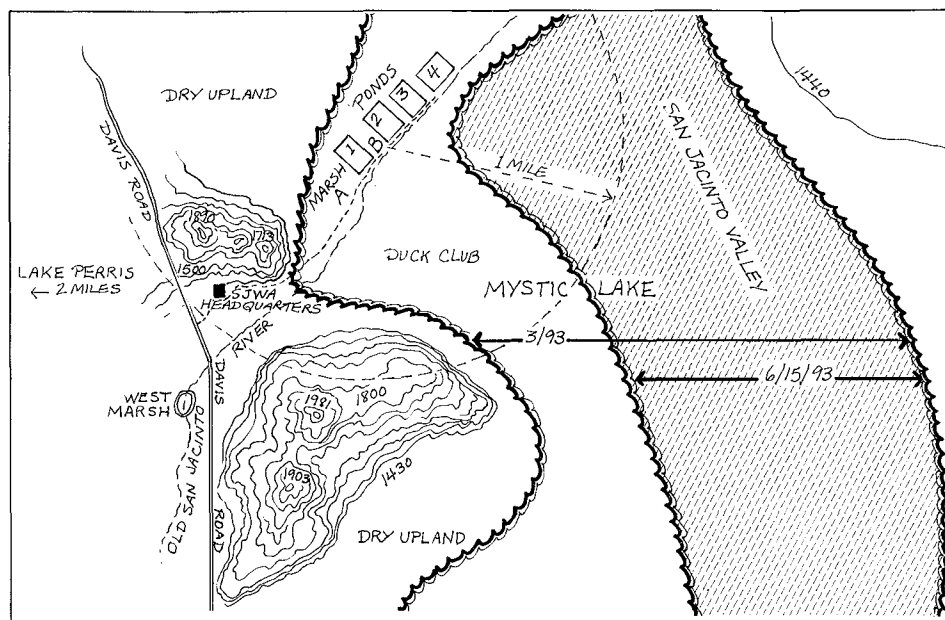
The impact of the significantly diminished foraging area due to flooding appears to be the cause of the splitting of the major colony and the eventual abandonment of the nesting effort in Marsh B. The undisturbed, dry, upland areas of the SJWA did not appear to provide sufficient food for the nesting tricolors.

Beedy et al. (1991) cite several authors who have observed abandonment of tricolor colonies. The presence of concentrated insect food supplies appears to be the major

factor in the selection of nest sites, and the loss of such food supplies leads to mass desertion.

Avian responses to varying and irregular food sources has resulted in nomadic behavior. Nomadism reaches its zenith in Australia where 26 percent of the land birds are nomads due to great yearly variation in the rainfall (Rowley, 1975:67). In North America, nomadic species are few, Lawrence's Goldfinch perhaps the best example. Tricolored Blackbirds are nomadic and have evolved the ability to respond to varying food supplies, first by nest site selection and second by abandonment when the food supply fails (Orians, 1961). In this case, it was the ephemeral Mystic Lake that eventually did the tricolors in!

ing success of the Tricolored Blackbird at the SJWA in 1993, a long term effect is doubtful. Tricolors have had hundreds of thousands of years to evolve mechanisms to cope with such a short-term problem. Far more significant is the increasing encroachment of humans and the changing land use. As development progresses, the alfalfa fields of the San Jacinto Valley will grow houses but grown green caterpillars no longer. Perhaps the catastrophic event of nesting failure in Marsh B is but a prelude to the future disaster for the Tricolored Blackbird in the San Jacinto Valley. ➤



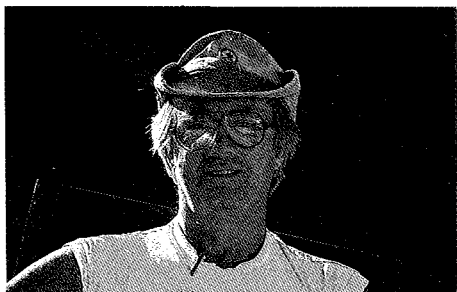
Conservation

The numbers of Tricolored Blackbirds are decreasing. The marshes and associated feeding areas that they require for nesting are declining statewide. In Southern California there are few colonies and they are relatively small. Gradually the tules and cattails are being eliminated. Red-wings are not so impacted. Their nest site requirements are less restricted. They'll make it!

While the presence of Mystic Lake had a major impact upon nest-

Literature cited.

- Beedy, E.C., S.D. Sanders and D.A. Bloom. 1991. Breeding status, distribution and habitat associations of the Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*), 1850-1989. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento.
- Bent, A.C. 1958. Life histories of North American blackbirds, orioles, tanagers and allies. Dover Publications, Inc. New York, NY.
- Orians, G.H. 1961. The ecology of blackbird (*Agelaius*) social systems. Ecol. Mono. 31(3): 282-312.
- 1968. A comparative study of the behavior of the Red-winged, Tricolored and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool. 84.
- 1980. Some adaptations of marsh-nesting blackbirds. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Rowley, I. 1975. Bird life. Wm. Collins, Sidney.



Charlie Collins

P E R S O N A L H I G H

by Charles T. Collins

No boats have been able to go out for a week, but if you're game we'll give it a try tomorrow." This did not auger well for an enjoyable day of birding at sea, but since we were unlikely to have another chance, it was this or nothing. In August 1974 Glen Woolfenden and I were making our way from Melbourne to Canberra, Australia to attend the International Congress of Ornithology along with our host and guide Ken Simpson. Ken's book, *The Birds of Bass Strait*, had impressed a commercial fisherman in Eden, New South Wales, who then offered to take him out should he ever be in the neighborhood. We were there to take him up on the offer even though the recent stormy weather suggested it might not be enjoyable or even possible.


Long before first light we were stuffed into all the warm clothes we had with us (as well as a couple of extra borrowed layers) and headed out to sea. An open deck working fishing boat did not offer much protection from wind or wave, but a couple of cups of scalding coffee kept us awake and warmed — at least on the inside. First light gave us fleeting glimpses of passing Fluttering Shearwaters, Crested Terns and an alcid-like Diving Petrel thus guaranteeing that, even if we were forced to turn back by the weather, the trip would not be a total loss.

As dawn progressed to early morning the seas proved to be more than acceptably calm, and the sun began to burn through the overcast which had characterized the preceding several days. Not to waste the opportunity, a trawl was soon

launched, and we settled down for an hour or so of slow going with the large net spread out behind us. Gannets, White-fronted Terns and a passing Eastern Curlew kept our eyes and binoculars busy. In addition, we were soon accompanied by several not-so-shy Shy Albatrosses which not only flew by at close range but also settled on the water, acting much like 'moocher' gulls waiting for a handout. When the trawl was brought in we all helped sort the catch and toss the trash fish overboard to the waiting albatrosses which crowded right up to the boat competing for each morsel. Perhaps attracted by the commotion, more and more birds arrived including many Shy, several Black-browed and two smaller Yellow-nosed Albatrosses to top it all off. The sea condition, lighting and birding steadily improved throughout the day as did the fishing. Between trawls there was plenty of time for close examination and photography of our steady company of

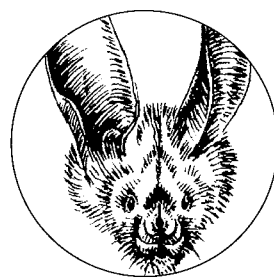
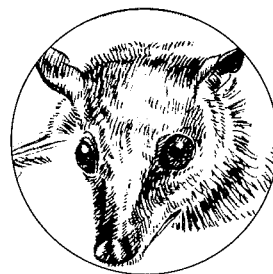
waiting albatrosses which numbered just over 250 for several hours. The bravest even pulled fish through the mesh of the trawl net as it came over the rail. One of these was itself grabbed by the captain and brought aboard for closer examination in arms ("in hand" just isn't an appropriate description for handling a bird of this size).

By the end of the day, much of it spent on a calm sea in shirt-sleeve weather, we were exhausted of both energy and film and sated, if you can imagine it, with views of albatrosses and their diverse plumages. The trip back to port into a magnificent sunset had us looking for Silver and big-billed Pacific Gulls just for a change of pace.

We saw many more fascinating and beautiful birds during our month in Australia but this plethora of albatrosses was clearly a highlight of the trip. It has been nearly two decades since this exceptional day of birding, but the thrill of it lingers on. 



Charles T. Collins



O P E N E Y E S

by Dan Kahane

Bats are the only mammals capable of true flight. They live in a variety of habitats including tropical forests, on mountain tops and in deserts. Some eat only insects. Others, particularly in warm parts of the world, eat fruit or drink nectar. Some even eat fish or, like the famous vampire bats of Mexico, Central and South America, live on the blood of mammals.

Bats provide an extremely valuable service as predators of nocturnal insects. They are the ultimate bug-zappers: One bat can easily eat up to 600 mosquitoes in one hour. How many mosquitoes can a bat eat in six hours? How many mosquitoes can one thousand bats consume in six hours?

Not only do bats help keep insect populations in check, they are important pollinators of hundreds of species of plants including bananas, avocados, guavas, dates, figs, peaches, mangos, cloves, cashews, carob, balsa, manila and maguey cactus! Because they can fly, bats can distribute seeds over a wide range of forest or field. They help maintain rain forests by spreading seeds which become trees. This helps replace the trees that die naturally or are cut down. Don't bats sound like candidates for VIP treatment? Yet, worldwide bat populations are in trouble, and many of the close to one thousand different kinds (or species) of bats in the world are endangered.

Some Things to Try

- Bats actually see quite well, but insect-eating bats use sonar, or echolocation, to help find their prey.

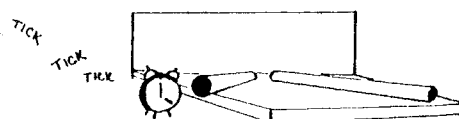
Here is a simple activity that demonstrates how sound waves bounce off objects, making echolocation possible.

Materials: Two paper towel tubes or funnels; one ticking timer or noise maker; two pieces of board or cardboard for the base; nails or glue.

Procedure: (1) Use the two pieces of board or a folded piece of cardboard to build a base and wall for your experiment.



(2) Nail or glue tubes or funnels to the base as shown. (3) Place the noise source near the end of one tube. (4) Listen to the end of the other tube. (5) Now try the experiment with the back wall down flat.



Discussion: Describe the sound you heard. How do you think this worked? What happened when you removed the back wall? How might a bat use this hunting technique?

Extensions: What is the nature of sound? How do bats produce sounds? How does that compare with how birds produce sounds?

- Several species of bats live in or visit our local mountains. Visit

Topanga State Park or Tapia Park at dusk, and keep your eyes on the sky over open fields or near electric lights. Can you hear them echolocating? Some of the bats you may see include California Leaf-nosed Bats, big brown bats, California bats or even red or hoary bats.

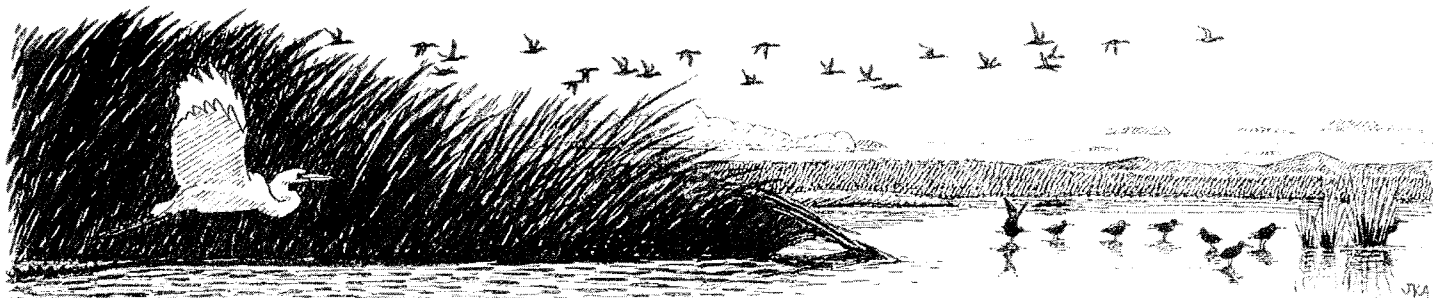
- Next time you visit the supermarket, try making a list of bat-pollinated products (see paragraph 3). When you get home, try to locate some of the places where these plants are grown.

- Bats and other endangered species will be present both live and in costume at the Audubon All Species Day on Saturday, October 30, 1993, at the Los Angeles Zoo. How about coming dressed as your favorite bat (or a snow leopard or even a giant kangaroo rat)? For more information, see the September *Tanager*.

To learn more about bats, contact Bat Conservation International, P.O. Box 162603, Austin, TX 78716. An excellent resource is *America's Neighborhood Bats: Understanding and Learning to Live in Harmony with Them*, written by Merlin D. Tuttle, the founder of BCI.



Portions of this article are excerpted from the *Audubon Adventures* student newsletter and *Leader's Guide: Let's Chat About Bats*. LAAS provides *Audubon Adventures* to more than 200 classrooms in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Reprinted with permission of National Audubon Society.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

It's the environment, stupid!" That's the war cry of powerful, self-serving interests in California who want to see the painfully achieved environmental laws diluted, crippled and eventually destroyed. If they could only get rid of the California Endangered Species Act and the California Environmental Quality Act, this great state would zoom out of its devastating recession and into a golden era of prosperity. Their incantation of gloom says that our expensive taste for regulation of business is driving companies out of the state and deepening the near-depression. It is jobs versus the environment, and the environment is going to have to give.

The miserable state of the economy cannot be denied. But is it really the fault of environmental regulations? California is simply getting the lion's share of the national economic predicament. Defense cutbacks and closure of military bases here have cost us many jobs in aerospace and its satellite industries. Foreign tourism, a lucrative source of income, is down as the global economy declines. One cannot fault the environment for the costly mess of worker's compensation. The Spotted Owl can hardly be blamed for an industry that is putting its own people out of work as the sawmills are automated or because it is forced to sell unfinished logs to Japan.

The repeated claim that environmental laws are destroying jobs and lowering our competitive stature is being challenged in many areas. Solid data is now available:

- **Recycling:** In 1991 there were 1,077 recycling firms employing

14,000 workers in California.

- **Pollution control:** There were 3 million jobs nationally in this field in 1991; 424,000 of them in California.

- **Fishing:** Over 19,000 people are employed along the North Coast in jobs related to recreational fishing; 4,000 are engaged in the commercial harvest.

- **Tourism:** In 1990, campers alone contributed more than \$2.2 billion and 31,000 jobs to California's economy.

- **Technology:** California-based firms accounted for eight percent of the *global* trade in environmental technology in 1991.

Altogether more than 550,000 jobs in California are related to environmental protection, regulation or restoration. It is clear, then, that rather than an obstacle to California's economic progress, the environmental field can be a significant stimulus to our recovery.

Astonishingly, there were 40 bills introduced in this year's session of the state legislature that were aimed at watering down or eviscerating the California Environmental Quality Act. Most of them were inspired and supported by landowners, agribusiness and industries which are trying to convince the public that "it's the environment, stupid!" What we're saying is that this is a phony argument. An MIT study over the last 20 years shows that tough environmental regulations do not inhibit economic growth, jobs or competitiveness. This year the Bank of America's business outlet report said that "millions of jobs can be created in environmental industries, resource management can be improved and strong economic

growth can be sustained."

The "Jobs versus the Environment" cry is dirty pool, a nasty political device invented to torpedo the laws that make life worth living in the Golden State.

Source: "Environmental Jobs Are a Growth Industry," by Jill Shirley, *San Jose Mercury News*.

Win-Win Recycling

A neat way to promote the recycling ethic in a very practical way is to take advantage of CALMAX, the California Materials Exchange. Sponsored by the State Integrated Waste Management Board, it provides a unique symbiotic relationship between small businesses.

The idea behind CALMAX is simple: the trash of one company is the treasure of another. In a free bi-monthly catalog, companies can list any nonhazardous material they either want or have available for reuse or recycling. The materials listed are inexpensive or free because they previously would have simply been thrown away by the generating companies.

This is a win-win environmental solution. It keeps a mess of usable materials out of the bulging landfills and conserves our resources by reducing the amount of virgin materials used by California business.

Call the Recycling Hotline at (800) 553-2962. Ask to be put on the mailing list and request a catalog.

3rd Annual Return to Meyers Ranch

Sponsored by the San Diego County Parks Society and the Friends of the Tijuana River Valley.

**Friday, October 8, 7:00 P.M. —
Tijuana River Estuary Visitor
Center, 301 Caspian Way, Impe-
rial Beach — \$10**

Come to the premier showings of "Timeless River," a special video on the Tijuana River Valley Estuary. A second "surprise" feature will also be presented.

The film was produced by Earth Vision Productions, well known for their educational programs and environmental and wildlife documentaries. Representatives will be on hand to answer questions and will have tapes available for sale.

Last winter's floods changed the face of the valley in a dramatic fashion. Some familiar birding spots are gone, while others have been created. Plans for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park have also been affected. Staff from the Parks Department will bring you up to date on all the changes. Plans for the Visitor Contact Station, scheduled for January '94 completion, will be unveiled.

A champagne reception is included for this very special event.

**Saturday, October 9, 7:00 A.M. —
Meyers Ranch — \$5**

Take I-5 south to Coronado Ave./Imperial Beach Blvd. exit. Go south on Hollister to Guy's Place and Effie May Farms (Meyers Ranch), just across the temporary bridge. Parking is available on Hollister Street.

Start your morning at Guy's Place with coffee, muffins and some of the best doughnuts you've ever tasted. Plans for the Visitor Contact Station, scheduled for January '94 completion, will be unveiled. Then it's on to a morning of birding

the valley — one of the best places in the county to find rare birds. There will be plenty of local experts to aid in the hunt. Restrooms available.

Saturday, October 9, Noon — \$5

Continue south on Hollister and then west on Monument Road to the end.

Meet for lunch at Border Field. From the spectacular overlook above the valley, enjoy lemonade and sandwiches and talk with the rangers from the various agencies that serve there. We'll also go over the list of bird sightings for the morning — from Pectoral Sandpipers to Chestnut-sided Warblers to Red-throated Pipits. Anything's possible!

Prices are listed for each event; attend all three for \$18. Reservations are requested. Send reservation with your check to San Diego County Parks Society, P.O. Box 957, Bonita, CA 92002-0830.

For additional information, call (619) 694-3049. ➤

Volunteer Opportunity

Here is an easy way for you to help out LAAS by giving less than a half hour of your time a month: become our Publicity Chairperson.

Each month we send press releases to eight publications, giving a brief description of our monthly meeting. All you need to do is write a short announcement, photocopy it, address the envelopes (preprinted labels can be provided) and affix postage.

Of course if you have more time to spare and like being creative, there are other opportunities for you to put your public relations talents to work. If not, then we will appreciate your half hour contribution just the same.

Interested? Call Tom Van Huss at (310) 306-4889. ➤

WESTERN TANAGER

Published 10 times a year by
Los Angeles Audubon Society,
a chapter of National Audubon Society.

EDITOR: Jean Brandt
CONSERVATION: Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:
Kimball Garrett
FIELD TRIPS: Nick Freeman
PROGRAMS: Dan Kahane
PELAGIC TRIPS: Phil Sayre
DESKTOP PUBLISHING: WP Plus
PRINTING: Marcotte Printing
PHOTO SCANS: Studio Image

Opinions expressed in articles or letters herein do not necessarily express the position of this publication or of LAAS.

PRESIDENT: Fred Heath
1st VICE PRESIDENT: Pat Little
2nd VICE PRESIDENT: Peter Shen
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:
Mildred Newton
RECORDING SECRETARY:
Pat Nelson
TREASURER: Richard Epps

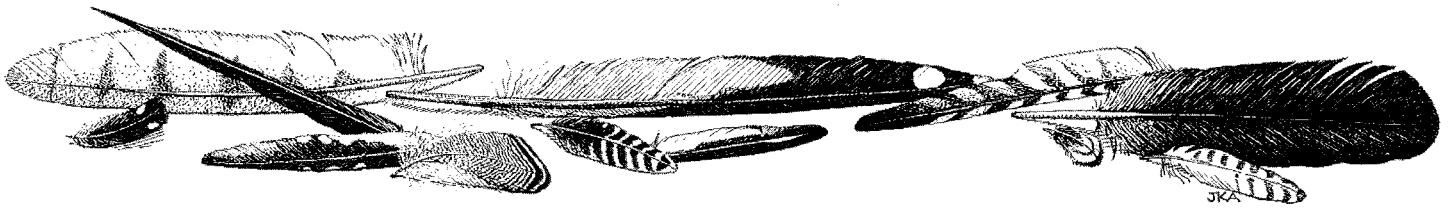
Annual membership in both societies is \$35 per year, \$21 for seniors and presently \$20 for new members for their first year. Members receive the *Western Tanager* newsletter and *Audubon* magazine, a national publication. Renewals of membership are computerized by National Audubon and should not normally be sent to LAAS; however, new memberships and renewal of lapsed memberships may be sent directly to LAAS. Make checks payable to of National Audubon Society.

Nonmembers 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.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
Headquarters, Library
and Bookstore are open to the public
Tuesday-Saturday
10:00 A.M.-3:00 P.M.
213 876-0202 — office
213 876-7609 — fax

Printed on Recycled Paper





A C C L O S E R L O O K

by Kimball L. Garrett

The Mew Gull

(*Larus canus*)

Across the northern hemisphere, from northwestern Europe east through Siberia to Alaska and western Canada, lie the breeding grounds of a complex of gulls collectively known as the "Common" or "Mew" Gull. Our representative of this group is *Larus (canus) brachyrhynchus*, sometimes called the "Short-billed Gull." *Brachyrhynchus* is a tad smaller than the Common Gull of Europe (nominate *canus*) and quite a lot smaller than the neighboring race *kamtschatschensis* in eastern Siberia. The small size and muted pattern of our *brachyrhynchus* Mew Gulls make them rather easy to distinguish from the generally similar Ring-billed Gull; the other races would make us look twice (a

problem east coast birders must contend with, as nominate *canus* is regularly seen there). I'll leave it to a more gull-able author to prepare you for California's future first record of Kamchatka Gull and opt to concentrate on some musings of more local interest.

Our wintering Mew Gulls are present along the coast in numbers from November through March but are patchily distributed south of Ventura. They particularly favor coastal sewage treatment facilities and outfalls, sheltered bays and harbors (especially around fishing operations and bait tanks) and estuaries. They'll follow fishing (and birding) boats well offshore and occur also around the Channel Islands.

Like many of our "coastal" gulls, the Mew Gull ventures inland in the coastal basins with some regularity. Small numbers occur every winter at such diverse localities as Echo Park, Peck Road Water Conservation Area (El Monte), Hansen

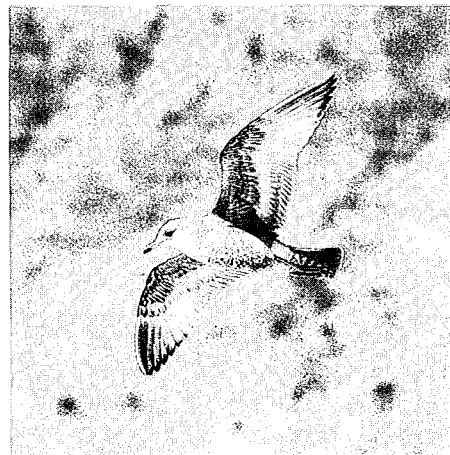
Dam and Castaic Lake (with up to 20 in a day at this last locality). They often make their way inland as far as the Riverside area and occur nearly annually at the Salton Sea. But the species is not normally met with in the desert regions. Perhaps the species' fondness for sewage treatment plants explains its occurrence twice in the past ten years at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on the western edge of the Mojave Desert. A well-worn second year bird spent much of July and August 1982 there, and two birds were on these ponds on 25 April 1993, with one remaining until 8 May. Interestingly, these records are from well after our wintering birds normally depart.

Much remains to be learned of the status of this species and many other "coastal" species in the interior of our region. Any interior bodies of water that can be covered regularly through the year are bound to be goldmines for refining our knowledge of bird distribution.

Adult Mew Gull, Echo Park, Los Angeles, February 1991



First winter Mew Gull, off Santa Catalina Island, March 1987



Worn Mew Gull (foreground), Lancaster Sewage Ponds, May 1993



Photos: Kimball L. Garrett

RARE BIRD ALERTS

United States

Alabama

Statewide (205) 987-2730

Alaska

Statewide (907) 338-2473

Arizona

Phoenix (602) 832-8745

Tucson (602) 798-1005

Arkansas

Statewide (501) 753-5853

California

Arcata (707) 826-7031

Los Angeles (213) 874-1318

Monterey (408) 375-9122

Updates (408) 375-2577

Morro Bay (805) 528-7182

Northern California (510) 528-0288,
& 524-5592

Orange County (714) 563-6516 (weekly)

Sacramento (916) 481-0118

San Bernardino (909) 793-5599

San Diego (619) 479-3400 (daily)

Santa Barbara (805) 964-8240

SW Sierra/San Joaquin (209) 782-1237

Colorado

Statewide (303) 279-3076

Connecticut

Statewide (203) 254-3665

Delaware

Statewide (215) 567-2473

District of Columbia

Districtwide (301) 652-1088

Florida

Statewide (813) 984-4444

Miami (305) 667-7337

Lower Keys (305) 294-3438

Georgia

Statewide (404) 509-0204

Idaho

Northern (208) 882-6195

Southeast (208) 236-3337

Illinois

Central Illinois (217) 785-1083

Chicago (708) 671-1522

Indiana

Statewide (317) 259-0911

Iowa

Sioux City (712) 262-5958

Statewide (319) 338-9881

Kansas

Statewide (913) 372-5499

Kansas City (913) 342-2473

Kentucky

Statewide (502) 894-9538

Louisiana

Baton Rouge (504) 293-2473

New Orleans (504) 246-2473

Maine

Statewide (207) 781-2332

5pm-8am wkdays;

24 hr wkends

Downtown/Central (207) 288-2829

Maryland

Statewide (301) 652-1088

Massachusetts

Boston (617) 259-8805

Western Mass. (413) 253-2218

Michigan

Statewide (616) 471-4919

Detroit (313) 477-1360

Sault Ste. Marie (705) 256-2790

Minnesota

Duluth (218) 525-5952

Statewide (612) 827-3161

Mississippi

Coast (601) 467-9500

Missouri

Kansas City (913) 342-2473

Statewide (314) 445-9115

St. Louis (314) 935-8432

Montana

Statewide (406) 721-2935

Nebraska

Statewide (402) 292-5325

Nevada

Southern (702) 649-1516

Northwest (702) 324-2473

New Hampshire

Statewide (603) 224-9900

(M-F: 5pm-9am, weekends: 24 hrs)

New Jersey

Cape May (609) 884-2626

Statewide (908) 766-2661

New Mexico

Statewide (505) 662-2101

New York

Albany (518) 439-8080

Buffalo (716) 896-1271

Cayuga Lake Basin (607) 254-2429

To report (607) 277-5455

Lower Hudson Valley (914) 666-6614

New York (212) 979-3070

Rochester (716) 461-9593

Syracuse (315) 682-7039

North Carolina

Statewide (704) 332-2473

Ohio

Cincinnati (513) 521-2847

Cleveland (216) 321-7245

Columbus (614) 221-9736

Blendon Woods Park (614) 895-6222

SW Ohio (513) 277-6446

NW Ohio (419) 875-6889

Youngstown (216) 742-6661

Oklahoma

Oklahoma City (405) 373-4531

Statewide (918) 669-6646

Oregon

Statewide (503) 292-0661

Southern Oregon (503) 826-7011

(10pm-6am weekdays only)

Northeastern (208) 882-6195

Pennsylvania

Allentown (215) 252-3455

Philadelphia (215) 567-2473

Western Penna. (412) 963-0560

Wilkes-Barre (717) 825-2473

Rhode Island

Statewide (401) 231-5728

To Report (401) 231-6444

South Carolina

Statewide (704) 332-2473

Tennessee

Statewide (615) 356-7636

Chattanooga (615) 843-2822

Texas

Statewide (713) 992-2757

Austin (512) 483-0952

Northcentral (817) 261-6792

Lower Rio Grande Valley (210) 565-6773

San Antonio (210) 733-8306

Sinton (512) 364-3634

Utah

Statewide (801) 538-4730

Vermont

Statewide (802) 457-4861

(M-F: 5pm-9am, Sat/Sun: 24 hrs)

To report: (802) 457-2779

Virginia

Statewide (804) 929-1736, (301) 652-1088

Washington

Statewide (206) 526-8266

Southeastern (208) 882-6195

Wisconsin

Statewide (414) 352-3857

Madison (608) 255-2476 (except 9-3 M-F)

Wyoming

Statewide (307) 265-2473

Canada

Alberta

Calgary (403) 237-8821

Edmonton (403) 433-2473

British Columbia

Vancouver (604) 737-9910

Victoria (604) 592-3381

New Brunswick

Provincewide (506) 382-3825

Nova Scotia

Provincewide (902) 852-2428

Ontario

Provincewide (519) 586-3959

Ottawa (613) 761-1967

Sault Ste. Marie (705) 256-2790

Toronto (416) 350-3000

(pushbutton phones then enter 2293)

Windsor/Detroit (313) 477-1360

Windsor/Pt. Pelee (519) 252-2473

Hamilton (416) 648-9537

Long Point Bird Obs. (519) 586-3959

Quebec

Montreal (in French) (514) 355-7255

(in English) (514) 355-6549

Quebec City (in French) (418) 660-9089

Sagueny/Lac St. Jean (in French) (418) 696-1868

Bas St. Laurent (in French) (418) 725-5118

Western Quebec (in French) (819) 778-0737

Saskatchewan

Regina (306) 761-2094

rev 8/93

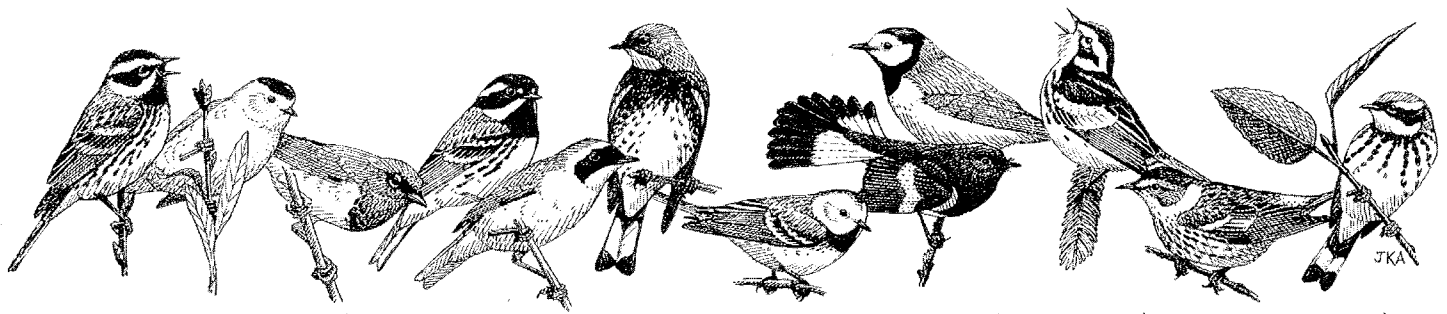
Our thanks to the American Birding Association for this rare bird alert list.

ABA is a non-profit international association dedicated to supporting birders and to fostering public appreciation of birds and their vital role in the environment. Membership in ABA is open to all serious birders worldwide and includes *Birding*, a bi-monthly full-color magazine and *Winging It*, a lively monthly newsletter.

For membership information, write to:

**ABA Membership Services
PO Box 6599
Colorado Springs, CO 80934**

or call toll-free 800-850-2473.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

October brings the climax of the fall vagrant season. Birders will search coastal areas, city parks and desert oases for these out-of-place wanderers. Places that traditionally turn up unusual sightings include Pt. Loma and the Tijuana River bottom in San Diego County; Huntington Beach Central Park in Orange County; Harbor Lake and Tapia Park, Malibu Creek and lower Zuma Canyon in Los Angeles County; Pt. Mugu and the Oxnard Plain in Ventura County; and Carpinteria Creek, Goleta and Gaviota Beach in Santa Barbara County. Southeastern Kern County oases such as the California City/Galileo area are usually very productive. For directions to these and other "vagrant traps" see Hank Childs's *Where Birders Go In Southern California* or Harold Holt's *A Birder's Guide to Southern California*, both available at the LAAS Bookstore.

The past few weeks (20 July to 20 August) have been relatively quiet with the exception of the **Little Curlew** which was found at the Santa Maria River mouth in Santa Barbara County on 4 August by Brad Hines and still present on 20 August. There have been two previous sightings of this Siberian species in this area, and they might all pertain to the same individual.

The relatively lush growth in the Antelope Valley from last winter's record rains have caused an explosion in the rodent population. Kimball Garrett reports that **Northern Harrier**, **White-tailed Kite**, **Swainson's Hawk** and **Long-eared** and possibly **Short-**

eared Owl have bred in the valley this past summer.

Most unusual was a very rare summer sighting of a gray phase **Northern Fulmar** off the Marina del Rey outer breakwater on 1 August (Tom Frillman and Fred Heath), and a **Blue-footed Booby** was spotted at the north end of the Salton Sea on 25 July (Bob McKernan). The off-and-on **Cook's Petrel** at the Salton Sea was last seen during the first week of August.

An immature **Brown Pelican** on the Pine Mountain Club golf course on 10 August (Hank Brodtkin) is only the third record for Kern County. Approximately 20 pair of **White-faced Ibis** fledged young at Piute Ponds, Edwards Air Force Base (KG).

Reports of one or two **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were widespread with one along the L.A. River in Long Beach on 8 August (Mitch Heindel), two at Furnace Creek (Richard Webster) and one at

Piute Ponds (KG), both sightings on 15 August.

A **Virginia's Warbler** was at Morongo Valley on 14 August (Howard King). A **Lucy's Warbler** was at Hansen Dam on 22 August (Dustin Alcala), and a **Worm-eating Warbler** was at Lake Palmdale on the same day (Kimball Garrett and Jonathan Alderfer). An *Aimophila* sparrow, probably **Cassin's**, was found at Death Valley Junction on 15 August (RW).

Good Birding! —

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

Hank Brodtkin OR **David Koeppel**
27-½ Mast Street (310) 454-2576
Marina del Rey, CA 90292
(310) 827-0407

Albatrosses (!) photographed by Charlie Collins off New South Wales, Australia 1974




FIELD TRIPS

Continued from page 12

Saturday, October 9 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Leader **Mary Carmona**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the Nature Center at 1000 Durfee Ave. Take the 60 Fwy to South El Monte, just W of the 605 Fwy, taking the Peck Dr. exit S. Take the offramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right), and make a left into the Nature Center.


Sunday, October 10 — Mojave Vicinity. Leader **Larry Allen**. We will meet where Jawbone Canyon Rd. intersects with Hwy 14 N of Mojave. We will then proceed to Butterbrecht Springs, Galileo Hills and a picnic and more birds at California City Central Park. Come prepared for a possibly very hot, dusty, fun day. Take Hwy 14 past Mojave, continue N on Hwy 14 about 17 miles to Jawbone Canyon Rd. on the west side. We will meet at 6:30 A.M. at the Jawbone Canyon Recreation Area sign just off the highway. About two hours' driving time from L.A. Send \$5 fee to LAAS to register.

 **Saturday, October 16 — L.A. County Pelagic Trip on the *Vantuna* toward Santa Barbara Island; 6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. Cost \$32. Leaders **Kimball Garrett** and **Jonathan Alderfer**.**


Saturday, October 16 — Van Norman Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá** or **Doug Martin**. Riparian and grassland habitat surround the reservoir and adjacent ponds. Passerine migrants, raptors, Canada Geese, other waterfowl. 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) side. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in the lot inside the gate on the left. We will carpool from there and stop about 1:00 P.M. Restrooms on-site.

Sunday, October 17 — Oxnard Plains. Leader **Fred Heath** will be exploring the windbreaks and thickets that crisscross the agricultural plains around Oxnard. Usually excellent for warblers, vireos and other migrants. Possible vagrant chasing. From the 101 Fwy, take Las Posas Rd. S, turn right on Pleasant Valley Rd., and left on Laguna Rd. If coming via Hwy 1, take Pleasant Valley Rd. inland to Laguna Rd. and turn right. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the side of Laguna Rd. across from the big house. Bring a lunch and bird into the afternoon.

Sunday, October 24 — Sketching Birds in the Field. Renowned bird artist **John Schmitt** will show eight neophytes how to render useful bird sketches for field documentation. Spotting scope, folding chair and sketch pad mandatory. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at Malibu kiosk. Phone LAAS to sign up.

 **Friday, Saturday and Sunday, November 5-7.** See October 1-3 write-up for details. Leaders **Kimball Garrett** and **Mitch Heindel**.

Saturday, November 6 — Antelope Valley. Leader **Irwin Woldman**. We will look for raptors and possibly longspurs, and see much more in this fine winter birding region. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the LaMont-Odett Overlook on the E side of Hwy 14 after the Pearblossom Hwy turnoff but before Palmdale.

 **Sunday, November 7 — L.A. County Pelagic Trip on the *Vantuna*.** Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon; 7:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Cost \$20. Leaders **Herb and Olga Clarke**.

Sunday, November 7 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See October 3 write-up for details.

Saturday, November 13 — Van Norman Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá** or **Doug Martin**. Meet at 7:30 A.M. See October 16 write-up for details.

Tuesday, November 16 — Hansen Dam. Join **Dustin Alcalá** as he searches for birds in a variety of habitats filling the old lake bed. Meet at 7:00 A.M. and bird until about 10:30 A.M. From the 170, 5 or 405 Fwys N, take the 118 (Simi Valley) Fwy E to the Glenoaks Blvd. offramp. Continue SE for one mile, turn left on Osborne St., then right on Dronfield St. Head straight into the parking lot. 🐦

Corrections

We regret the misspelling of John Schmitt's name in last month's *Tanager*.

We also omitted crediting the photos on page 8 to Kimball L. Garrett.

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:
LAAS Reservations
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 Wednesdays from noon to 4:00 P.M. to answer questions about field trips. Our office staff is also available Tuesday through Saturday for most reservation services.



Olga Clarke in Costa Rica

EVENING MEETING

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

October 12

Olga Clarke
The Best of Costa Rica

The program will feature the birds, animals, insects, plants and spectacular scenery of Costa Rica. Olga has led trips to this Central American country for the past 18 years and will show slides covering the top birding areas in both the northern and southern parts of this neotropical birding paradise, including the Caribbean and Pacific coasts.

F I E L D T R I P S

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.

↓ **Denotes Pelagic Trips**

⚓ **Friday, Saturday and Sunday, October 1-3.** Deep water trip out of Ventura northwest past Pt. Conception to the Continental Shelf via Arguello Canyon. Leave dock Friday at 10:00 P.M. and return Sunday at 2:00 A.M. (28 hrs.). Six

large double bunks for two people at \$210; nine single bunks at \$130. Cost includes three meals. No space for ice chests. Leaders **Mitch Heindel** and **Richard Webster**.

Saturday, October 2 — Sepulveda Basin Natural Area. Leader **Steve Ducatman**. This was the first summer with the pond full of water, improving wildlife possibilities. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in the first parking area at Woodley Park. Take Burbank Blvd. W from the 405 Fwy, turn right onto Woodley Ave. and continue to the Woodley Park entrance on the right.

Sunday, October 3 — San Diego Area. Leader **Nick Freeman**. A good portion of the morning will certainly be spent at Pt. Loma. Some odd birds have been known to pop up here during late migration. Other possible areas include the Tijuana Marsh and nearby farm fields. Take the 5 Fwy S about three miles past Route 52 to the Claremont Drive offramp and head W into the small lot adjacent to the Mission Bay Information Center. Meet E of the kiosk at 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch. Send \$5 fee to LAAS.

Sunday, October 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 at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$5 parking fee.

Los Angeles Audubon Society *DATED MATERIAL*
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard *Please Expedite*
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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

Continued on page 11