

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

PARTNERS IN FLIGHT AVES DE LAS AMERICAS

THE NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAM

by Larry L. Norris

From Alaska to West Mexico, volunteer opportunities for Audubon members are getting more exciting all the time.

A couple of years ago, I thought that NTMB (which stands for neotropical migratory bird) would be the “buzz-nymn” for at least a half decade’s worth of research. But the ornithologists, biologists and resource specialists in charge of conducting research on NTMBs for their particular agency have already shortened it a syllable to just plain old “Neotrops.” This does not mean that they have grown tired of their research; it only means that they have become more familiar with the NTMB concept. Many species of birds that we, in the United States, call “our” birds are really only “ours” for a brief time of the year during the breeding season. The other eight to nine months of the year they are migrating or wintering in the neotropics, which makes them, in the jargon, Neotrops.

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program, popularly called “Partners In Flight,” is sponsored by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This program and several offshoot programs by nongovernment organizations (NGOs) have, within the space of three years, provided many short- and long-term research opportunities for federal agencies to assist in, contribute to and benefit from.

The Partners In Flight program concentrates on neotropical migratory songbirds. The effort does not include waterfowl or shorebirds. Although these bird groups are technically neotropical migrants and derive incidental benefit from areas and habitats protected for songbirds, they already have a series of international treaties, agreements and conservation networks that are focused on their ecological needs. Until Partners In Flight came along, the migratory songbirds had no common voice and their collective ecological needs were not clearly understood by the conservation community.

This conservation program and its offshoots recently have gathered much momentum. These programs have now gained significant potential for assisting land managers in gathering data and creating knowledge about nesting, migrating and wintering songbird populations. Excitement runs high. It seems that just about everyone can in some way relate to those colorful songbirds that come to the backyard feeder every spring, or that were observed nesting in the campground during the family vacation.

Professionals and laymen alike develop and sustain interests in the life habits and ecological needs of migratory songbirds. Studying Neotrops is not a particularly difficult science, even though new mysteries and challenges seem to arise with every research program. As the bird enthusiast conducts a plot census or spends the morning working the banding station, a special affinity for Neotrops is established or strengthened. The work is serious. Time is short for these bird species. “Banding fever” has taken



Wilson's Warbler — *Neotrop*

on a new dimension. A passion for these small tufts of bright feathers and energy is awakened in most anyone who experiences their beauty, fragility and remarkable resilience. It is this very interest, affinity and passion that has created such a groundswell of support for Partners In Flight and its offshoot programs. Access to and involve-

ment in these programs should be of interest to managers, resource specialists and volunteers working with Neotrops anywhere in the West.

Partners In Flight is a U.S. federal interagency program. Four main federal agencies have signed on as contributors to the program: the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land

Management, and Forest Service. Partners In Flight "... is a comprehensive and cooperative effort involving partnerships among federal, state and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, industry and the academic community in both North and Latin America" (NFWF, 1990).

"The major goal of the program is to focus resources on the improvement of monitoring, research, management and education... involving neotropical migratory birds and their habitats" (NFWF, 1990). To accomplish this goal, a strategy that prioritizes species and habitats of greatest concern and develops a framework for long-term ecosystem protection is being employed. The five main program components — monitoring, management of habitats, research, education, and international partnerships — fit well with the many existing federal agency programs on inventory and monitoring, interpretation and management programs throughout the West. To assist Partners In Flight develop their strategy to prioritize species' habitats of greatest concern, the federal agencies would need to start a coordinated effort looking south of their own protected areas and begin to lend expertise to the development of a framework of protected areas in Latin America that would ensure the long-term viability of "our" breeding bird populations. Both wintering habitat and migratory stop-over areas would need to be identified.

For instance, the National Park Service has agreed to accomplish eight agency responsibilities as its contribution to Partners In Flight. These are:

- Develop an action plan to guide Service participation in the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program.
- Determine neotropical migratory bird use of the 30 parks that are included in the Migratory Bird Watch network.
- Establish long-term monitoring programs in park units.
- Develop long-term research pro-

grams on neotropical migratory bird ecology.

- Examine the effects of forest fragmentation.
- Assess park management practices on neotropical migratory birds by starting with a review of all park resource management plans.
- Implement and expand public education programs being developed through the Migratory Bird Watch Program.
- Develop "Sister Park" programs with Latin American countries, starting with initiatives in Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela (all from NFWF, 1990).

Similar agency responsibilities have been agreed to by the other three participating agencies.

Western Songbird Conservation Network

An early offshoot program to grow out of Partners In Flight is the Western Songbird Conservation Network, headed by the Colorado Bird Observatory (CBO). Since the majority of neotropical migrants from the western United States are known to winter along the Pacific slope of Mexico, the CBO decided to study the level of protection and habitat suitability for Neotrops in established parks, biosphere reserves and refuges in the Mexican states of Nayarit, Colima, Jalisco, Michoacan, Guerrero and Oaxaca. About 20 protected areas have been inventoried during the winter months when "our" birds were present. A park management needs assessment was conducted, and this information has been given to NGOs interested in helping Mexican parks and reserves meet their material and equipment needs, or in providing volunteer expertise in many different park-related disciplines. CBO hopes that this project will function to build cooperative programs between governmental and NGOs in the United States and Mexico, concentrating specifically on West Mexico habitats that serve as wintering grounds for "our" western breeding birds.

The West Mexico Connection

The West Mexico Connection is another early offshoot of Partners In Flight. The Denver Audubon Society realized early on that talk about the plight of neotropical migrants on their wintering grounds was not enough. Action had to be taken to ensure adequate protection of winter habitat for neotropical migratory birds from the western United States, specifically the state of Colorado. The West Mexico Connection program is designed to assist Mexican parks and protected areas in procuring the necessary materials, equipment, staff, training and expertise to better protect winter habitat. Binoculars, mist nets and other inventory equipment, along with instruction in inventory and monitoring methodologies, have been "exported" to our resource management colleagues in West Mexico.

The Western Songbird Conservation Network and the West Mexico Connection programs are fine examples of how the limited resources of local NGOs can be coordinated to provide rapid, essential and non-duplicative assistance in an area of international biological conservation that is often thought of as the territory of the global conservation heavyweights. Researchers and resource managers on western public lands would do well to contact these NGOs and others that have a similar interest, like the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, to discuss cooperation, assistance and needs. Neotrops only recognize habitat boundaries. In our conservation efforts, however, agency "boundaries" and NGO "territories" can have real impacts on effectiveness. The key word is cooperation.

Birds in the Balance

A new program being promoted by National Audubon Society is Birds in the Balance, which is patterned after Partners In Flight. It consists of four major action categories: Habitat Protection and Man-

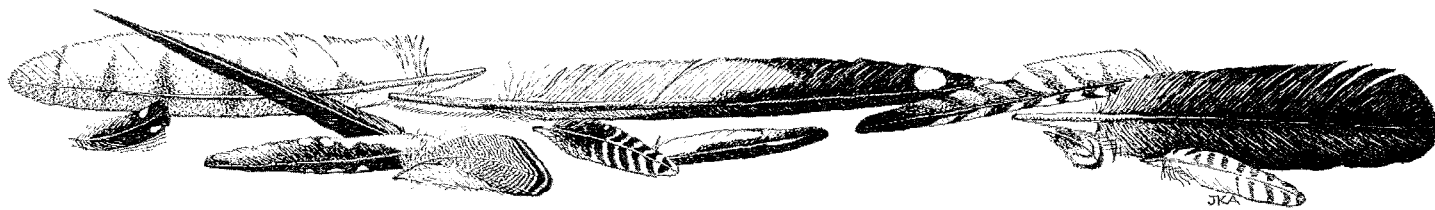
agement, Education and Outreach, Monitoring Programs, and International Partnerships. Each of these categories has a number of cooperative actions and strategies that Audubon chapters can adopt that would go a very long way toward accomplishing the conservation of songbird populations in the Americas. This national program has the potential to mobilize all Audubon Society members to contribute in some way, be it by field work, inventory, habitat enhancement, direct donation, speakers bureau or administrative support. The volunteer potential for activity on public and private lands throughout the West could be substantially increased.

With all this interest in neotropical migratory birds, a wealth of data is being generated by federal, state and local governments and NGOs in the United States and Latin America. This discussion could not include them all. In the future, researchers and resource managers from Alaska to Oaxaca will find themselves working side-by-side with other state and federal land managers and NGO staff and volunteers in a coordinated, cooperative effort to preserve habitat essential to the long-term survival of "our" Neotrops. There is no better time than now to start the communication and cooperation. 🐦

Literature Cited

1990 *Overview of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program*, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Washington, DC.

Larry L. Norris is a biologist with the National Park Service, stationed in Denver, Colorado. He is currently heading up an international assistance planning team which is writing long-term management plans for national parks in the Republic of Panama.



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

by Kimball L. Garrett

The Large-billed Sparrow *Passerculus [sandwichensis] rostratus*

The Savannah Sparrow is one of a number of North American bird species, many of them sparrows, which show considerable variation throughout their geographic range. Birders in the Los Angeles region are aware of the presence of two different "kinds" of Savannah Sparrows: the continental forms which are widespread in winter and migration in a variety of open habitats, and the slender-billed, heavily streaked coastal salt marsh subspecies *beldingi* (which is resident at the Ballona Wetlands and in other estuaries to the north and south of Los Angeles County). But there was yet another form of Savannah Sparrow which was a common post-breeding and winter visitor to the Los Angeles County coast until the middle of this century. This was the "Large-billed" Savannah Sparrow, a form breeding in marshes around the head of the Gulf of California. Early references and museum collections leave no doubt that this was once a common bird along our coast from August to April. Grinnell (Pasadena Academy of Sciences No. 11, 1898) said of the Large-billed Sparrow, "In San Pedro Harbor this bird frequents the wharves and breakwaters, and even hops fearlessly about the decks of vessels, feeding on crumbs and flies."

The Large-billed Sparrow is more than just a curiosity from bygone times. Although its numbers

have greatly declined, no doubt due to the decimation of the marshes at the mouth of the Colorado River due to our theft of the river's entire flow, it still finds its way to Southern California each year. Very small numbers occur in fall and winter in salt marshes of Orange and San Diego Counties, and there are recent records from Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties. Although the salt marshes of Los Angeles County have nearly been obliterated, Large-billed Sparrows should still be looked for in the Ballona/Playa del Rey area and around Long Beach and Los Angeles Harbors. In its heyday, it was as apt to be found on jetties, breakwaters and streets as in salt marshes, and these man-made habitats are certainly not in short supply.

Your best bet for seeing the Large-billed Sparrow in California is at the south end of the Salton Sea. Look along the immediate shoreline of the sea, along dikes and rip-rap; August to March is the best season.

Is the Large-billed Sparrow a distinct species or just a well-marked form of the Savannah Sparrow? Zink and co-authors (*Condor* 93:1016-1019, 1991) argue from mitochondrial DNA work that it is indeed a "good" species, and Sibley and Monroe, in a supplement to their check-list, have adopted this position. If recognized as a species,



Kimball L. Garrett

South end of the Salton Sea, Imperial County, 5 December 1993.

the Large-billed Sparrow (*Passerculus rostratus*) would include additional subspecies in coastal Sonora and Sinaloa, along the west coast of southern Baja California, and on the Islas San Benitos off west-central Baja. The members of this group are discussed (and beautifully illustrated by George M. Sutton) in a paper by A. J. Van Rossem (*Condor* 49:97-107, 1947).

That the question of species limits in Savannah Sparrows is unresolved should not be of concern to birders. Birds don't make magical transformations when the AOU or other bodies "split" or "lump" them. Large-billed Sparrows didn't lose their morphological and ecological uniqueness when Van Rossem "confirmed" that they were part of the Savannah Sparrow species in 1947, and they aren't any more distinct since Zink suggested full species status. Birders should always have been paying attention to these birds and should continue to do so. In these days of NAFTA and Neotrops, it makes no sense to ignore a bird with such bi-national credentials. ➤

Birdathon '94 Battle for Bucks!

This spring (April 1 – May 15) your Los Angeles Audubon Birdathon is back to raise money for the *Audubon Adventures* Program for kids, and you can be a part of it! Your LAAS teams will be going head-to-head with teams throughout Southern California from Santa Barbara to San Diego. Who will see the greatest number of species in 24 hours? Make a difference for the kids who will care for our planet tomorrow and show our birding neighbors who's boss!

There are several ways to get involved:

1) Form your own team (anything from a fully organized group in the field to a solo bird quest in your backyard) and recruit sponsors.

2) Join "Birding with an Expert," a special event where a group will be led along a fun and productive route which should yield over 130 species in one day. Your sponsors will be in shock!

3) If you can't get out in the field this spring, please send a contribution to help Audubon educate kids in grades three to six. Thirty dollars funds one classroom. Any support is welcome. Send your contribution in the envelope provided to: Los Angeles Audubon Birdathon '94 7377 Santa Monica Boulevard West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694.

Any questions? Please call Pete Shen at (310) 208-0266 or Cosmo Bloom at (818) 765-3141. 🐦

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New Arrivals at the Bookstore

<i>Birds of Argentina & Uruguay, A Field Guide</i> , Narosky & Yzurietta (ltd supply)	
1st Ed, 1989 (English)	34.95
2nd Ed, 1993 (English)	42.95
<i>Birding Brazil, A Checklist and Site Guide</i> , Bruce C. Forrester, 1993	31.95
<i>Checklist of Birds of Britain and Ireland</i> , A. G. Knox, 1992	9.95
<i>Birds of Indonesia, A Checklist</i> (Peters Sequence), Paul Andrew, 1992	17.95
<i>Birds of Northern & Central Alberta</i> , Barbara & Jim Beck, 1993	16.00
<i>Canadian Birds, Natural History</i> , Bruce Obee, 1993	TBA
<i>The Nature of the Islands, Eastern Caribbean</i> , Virginia Barlow, 1993	TBA
<i>Enjoying Birds in Hawaii, A Bird Finding Guide to the 50th State</i> , H. Douglas Pratt, 1993	18.95
<i>Birds of the Mayas, Field Guide to Birds of the Maya World</i> , Anne LaBastille (autographed)	11.95
<i>Birdwatcher's Guide to Malaysia</i> , John Bransbury, 1993	26.95
<i>Songs and Calls of Alaska Birds</i> , Alaska Bird Observatory (cassette) .	11.95
<i>Birding in Belize, The Hummingbird Highway</i> (VHS — 30 mins)	29.95

<i>Voices of the Cloud Forest</i> (Monteverde, Costa Rica), David L. Ross (CD)	TBA
<i>California's Sierra Nevada</i> , George Wuertthner	14.95
<i>Guide to Bird Sounds, National Geographic Society's Field Guide to Birds of North America</i> (CD)	TBA
<i>Flight Strategies of Migrating Hawks</i> , Paul Kerlinger, 1989	19.95
<i>Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Weather</i> , David M. Ludlum, 1993	18.00
<i>Backwoods Ethics, Environmental Issues for Hikers and Campers</i> , Laura & Guy Waterman, 1993	13.00
<i>California Vanishing Habitats and Wildlife</i> , B. Moose Peterson, 1993	21.95
<i>Survivors in the Shadows, Threatened and Endangered Mammals of the American West</i> , Gary Turbak and Lawrence Ormsby, 1993	19.95
<i>Attracting Butterflies to Your Backyard</i> (VHS — 58 mins)	29.95
<i>Butterflies Through Binoculars</i> , Jeffrey Glassberg, 1993	19.95
<i>Seals of the World</i> , Judith E. King, 1991	16.95

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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.

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Will Russell

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

by Will Russell

A by-product of running WINGS for twenty-odd years is that I've been lots of places. All of them were memorable. But my greatest pleasure is not seeing new birds; it's becoming ever more familiar with ones I already know. For that reason, my favorite birdwatching takes place on a three-mile walk near Seal Harbor, Maine; a walk I know so well I could make it blindfolded or, as I have, on the darkest night without a misstep. It's a walk I've done so often in the past 40 years — probably close to a thousand times — that instead of wondering what's coming next, I seem to *know* what's next. It's a walk where not only am I completely familiar with the birds, but I recognize every tree, flower and smell. It's a walk on which I feel a contentment that comes only from an intimate relationship with some bit of wild land and its creatures. For me birdwatching here — being here — is truly better than anywhere else.

My walk varies strikingly with the season, and I love each one, even deepest winter with the creak of frozen trees and the occasional little band of Black-capped Chickadees and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Let me take you on my last walk in June. It begins on the doorstep of my family's house. June sunrises come early in eastern Maine, and on this day it's already light at 4:30 A.M. Drinking tea on the stoop, I can hear Swainson's Thrush and White-throated Sparrow, the voices of summer Maine. Each has nested within 50 feet of the house every year — most years I find the nests — and the same male sparrow has

been here for three years, identifiable because it sings only half the normal song. "Poor Sam Peabody," the classic translation of White-throat's song, has been truncated to "Poor Sam Pees," according to my neighbor. Apparently that's all this bird needs, for it's been successful by every visible measure.

Blackburnian, Black-throated Green and Myrtle Warblers are audible as well, each announcing itself from near the top of a 100 foot tall White Spruce. It's June, but the B-t Green is singing "Zee Zee Zee Zoo Zee," the fast, energetic song typical of males establishing territories and seeking mates. Normally at this time our B-t Greens are singing the soft, slow "Zoo Zee Zoo Zoo Zee" of birds with incubating mates. Perhaps the Sharp-shinned Hawk that nests up the hill has recently broken up this pair.

Near the limit of my hearing, an Olive-sided Flycatcher calls. A wild storm last November knocked down a bunch of spruce by the harbor creating the kind of woods opening so favored by Olive-sideds. It's been five years since I could hear one from the doorstep, and its return offsets to a degree the loss of Magnolia Warbler, three pairs of which once bred within earshot. The understory Balsam Firs preferred by this species are now too big to offer cover. The last pair departed two years ago.

The first part of my walk crunches over reindeer moss near a grove of small White Birch. I note that the birch stub where Black-capped Chickadees nested last year has broken off at the nest hole, but there is no shortage of potential

nesting sites. A pile of spruce cone scales on a stump, a Red Squirrel feeding site, causes me to check the cone crop on a few of the big White Spruce. It's huge and I wonder if we'll have the onslaught of White-winged Crossbills that often comes on the heels of a big cone crop. Such invasions begin with a few scouts in June, and by mid-July the crossbills are everywhere. I'm curious about how they know to come. White Spruce have good cone crops every two years; perhaps the crossbills have learned that schedule, although their timing is certainly not flawless. One year they arrived in November and hatched young in January!

My walk now enters a carriage road, part of John D. Rockefeller's trail system that winds through much of eastern Mt. Desert Island. Last summer Pileated Woodpeckers were almost always here but the main attraction — carpenter ants that infested an old Red Maple — is now apparently gone. Friends tell me that the Pileateds are busy across the valley, but today I hear nothing. A bit farther along I can't resist checking a hole in an old spruce. Five years ago Black-backed Woodpecker nested here unsuccessfully, and although I've not seen one in summer since then I take an extra minute out of habit. Memories grow and require time to be nurtured, and I suspect this walk takes just a bit longer every year.

The carriage road makes an S-shaped descent on the north side of Barr Hill. At the bottom, in a cool corridor of maples and birches, the lazy notes of Black-throated Blue Warbler wash over the road. It's a

place I always stop, looking down a small stream bordered with Striped Maple and Maple-leaved Viburnum and whistling the burry song of B-t Blue between my teeth. The only two Ovenbird nests I've ever found were here, and though one bird is calling nearby I can't see it. Eastern Wood Pewee, Red-eyed Vireo and American Redstart are here too, as usual, and I think about the much-publicized decline of neotropical migrants. On my walk the numbers and species that inhabit climax forest types have oscillated within very narrow margins over the years. Change had come with new circumstances, as in the late 1970s and early 1980s when spruce budworm exploded here and Bay-breasted Warbler appeared as a breeding bird for the first time (since the 1940s I'm told) in the dense spruce-fir stands on the north side of Barr Hill.

The carriage road changes from grass to gravel and swings back to the south along a series of fields and marshes at the upper end of Little Long Pond. There are some American Woodcock probe holes by the side of the road, and I remember coming here at night with a long-handled net and a spotlight to catch and band them. Woodcock were easy to catch — the light seemed to paralyze them — but I never did figure out quite what they were doing. On bright nights, I could watch them come into the fields but they were always silent and showed no sign of feeding.

Across the pond two old Bald Eagle nests are faintly visible through the leaves. They've been unoccupied for nine years. Although twice in that time eagles acted territorial early in the season, nothing came of it. The marsh at the north end of the pond is noisy with Tree Swallow, Alder Flycatcher, Red-winged Blackbird and Swamp Sparrow. There seem to be fewer Tree Swallows this year, probably because of fewer nesting sites; some of the dead trees created by the new beaver dams four years ago must have fallen during the winter. Green-wing Teal are nesting, the

first time I've detected them since the new dams, but the Common Mergansers have apparently left. The pair that was here in late spring hasn't been seen in two weeks. Still, I wouldn't be greatly surprised to come here in a month and see ten little Common Mergs surrounding their mother as the conspicuous males depart the breeding lake once incubation begins. I listen closely to the "pip" call notes of Alder Flycatcher; birds here seem to have softer calls than those in Alaska, but I'll need to record both to be sure.

I remember a walk close to 25 years ago when I decided to go without binoculars (I can't recall why), and a jaeger rose from Little Long Pond and flew down its entire length, the only jaeger I've seen inland on Mt. Desert. I didn't know jaegers well at that time, and it was unspeakably frustrating to have this rare bird go unidentified. Nowadays, I take binoculars to the grocery store.

My walk ends at Bracy's Cove. In early June it's not especially birdy although there are Black Guillemots offshore and a Spotted Sandpiper picking at the tide line. My feet are warm and the 50 degree water feels wonderful. The huge granite rocks here have hosted

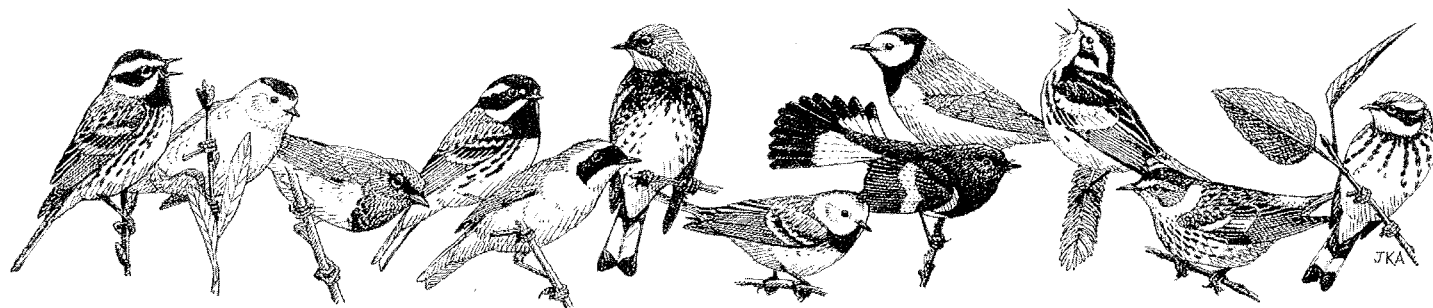
dozens of Russell family picnics, seen the capture of hundreds of mackerel and the consumption of countless lobsters. A small group of Cedar Waxwings is feeding on the last of the apple blossoms in a gnarled old tree just back from the shore. Decrepit as it looks, this tree produces the best apples in Seal Harbor.

My walk has taken two hours, about normal, although I've done it in twice the time and half the time. I've seen and heard perhaps 75 species. I've incrementally advanced my understanding of these birds, asked myself a few interesting questions, reaffirmed patterns of behavior, distribution and abundance, reminisced happily and been at peace. —

Will Russell lives in Tucson, Arizona, where he runs WINGS (along with a lot of help, he says). Will has birded all over the world, and he admits that birds have been his passion since he was six years old.



Spotted Sandpiper
By John Henry Dick



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

March is the month spring migration really gets under way. Rufous Hummingbirds, Western Kingbirds and Northern and Hooded Orioles begin to show up in numbers. Again we ask that you keep track of arrivals that seem early to you (a good guide would be *Birds of Southern California* by Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn) and to notify us.

These past two months have had their share of interesting species and patterns out of the ordinary winter distribution in our area.

More than 55 **Pied-billed Grebes** showed up in Sepulveda Basin on 28 November (Jean Brandt), and our only local report of **Red-necked Grebe** was on 2 January just below Sycamore Canyon Beach (Jerry Friedman). An obviously ill **Northern Fulmar** was close inshore at Cabrillo Beach (Thomas Miko). Ten **American White Pelicans** were in the Sepulveda Basin on 28 November (JB), and an **American Bittern** was at the same location on 20 November (Irwin Woldman). An immature **Reddish Egret** was reported at the north end of the Salton Sea on 6 January (Gjon Hazard).

A **Ross' Goose** was found at the El Dorado Nature Center in Long Beach on 5 December (Kevin Larson), and two **Eurasian Wigeon** were on Lake Norconian near Norco on 11 December (Arnold Small). **Black Scoter** reports include single birds at Pt. Mugu on 21 November (Jon Fisher), at El Segundo on 26 November (KL), and three at Playa del Rey on 18 December (also KL). The only **White-winged Scoter** report came from

inland — Apollo Park in Lancaster (Jonathan Alderfer). A female **Hooded Merganser** was seen at the L.A. Arboretum in Arcadia on 22 November (Gail Hightower), and a male was at Pepperdine Ponds in Malibu on 27 November (Bill Principe).

A dark morph **Rough-legged Hawk**, scarce the past few years, was in the Antelope Valley on 20 November (Laurie Conrad), and a **Golden Eagle** was spotted over the Van Nuys Courthouse on 26 November (JB). **Peregrine Falcons** were seen at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 21 November (Peter Shen) and over Century City on 9 December (JB).

A flock of **Mountain Plover** was first reported in the Antelope Valley on 20 November (LC). Single second year **Glaucous Gulls** were at the Santa Clara River mouth on 21 November (PS) and on the Los Angeles River at Anaheim Street on 25 December (KL). A **Common Murre** was in King Harbor on 27 November (Martin Byhower), and an **Ancient Murrelet** was discovered off Malibu Lagoon on Christmas day (Fred Heath).

A very late **Lesser Nighthawk** was reported from West Los Angeles on 20 November (JF), and 70 **Vaux's Swifts**, which should have gone south instead, were counted on the Pasadena CBC on 18 December (JFi). A male **Broad-billed Hummingbird** joined the female at South Coast Botanical Gardens on 1 December (LC), and another showed up at Veteran's Park in Sylmar on the 9th (Jon Ivanov).

Several **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were in Pine Canyon south of the

Antelope Valley on 20 November. An invasion of sapsuckers continued.

Yellow-bellieds were at Desert Center on 26 November (Hank & Priscilla Brodtkin and Mike Patten) and at Malaga Cove on 26 December (Curtis Johnson), and **Williamson's** were at Lake Lindero on 19 December (Mike San Miguel) and in Kagel Canyon on 26 December (Dustin Alcalá).

A **Vermilion Flycatcher** showed up at the El Dorado Nature Center on 5 December (KL), and a **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** was near Whittier on 18 December (JFi).

A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was seen on a field trip to Van Norman Dam (DA & Doug Martin). A **Lucy's Warbler** lingered at the South Coast Botanical Gardens after 6 December (MB), and a **Black-throated Green Warbler** was in Arcadia on 18 December (Tom Wurster).

A rare **LeConte's Sparrow** was found near Upper Newport Bay where it joined four **Sharp-tailed Sparrows** and perhaps as many as five **Swamp Sparrows** found there on 12 December (Tom Newhouse, Doug Willick and Brian Daniels).

A **Rusty Blackbird** was at Pepperdine Ponds on 25 November (FH), and adult male **Scott's Orioles** were at Chiriaco Summit on 27 November (H&PB) and at Veteran's Park, Sylmar, on 10 December (Wanda Dameron).

I hope all of you survived our latest Southern California event with a minimum of problems. Maybe the forces of the earth will let us be for a while so we can concentrate on what we like best. Good Birding! 🐦

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

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ACTION ALERT

Volunteerism Under Attack

Almost one hundred years ago, the National Audubon Society initiated the nation's first coordinated bird monitoring effort, the Christmas Bird Count. The database provided by the Christmas Bird Count constitutes the longest continuous record of bird populations available in North America.

The value of the data generated by the Count and the motives of volunteers like you were recently viciously attacked on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Late in October the House passed H.R. 1845, a bill to establish the National Biological Survey (NBS), a new agency within the Department of Interior. The purpose of the Survey is to better assess the Nation's biological resources, including birds.

Unfortunately, when the House passed this bill it also adopted harmful amendments, including one by Rep. Billy Tauzin (D-LA) to remove a provision authorizing the Secretary of Interior to accept the services of volunteers in conducting the Survey. Although attorneys are still evaluating the practical effect of this amendment (if it becomes law), the sponsor's intent is clear:

Volunteer Research Positions

Spring-Summer 1994

Interested in gaining practical experience in field research that has important conservation implications?

During 1994, Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO) will again conduct research activities on the Palos Verdes Peninsula dealing with the biology of California Gnatcatchers and Cactus Wrens. Both endangered bird species are characteristic of Southern California's coastal sage scrub ecosystem and are the focus of intensive conservation planning efforts being undertaken throughout Los Angeles, Orange,

they do not trust Audubon members and others to gather data, like the Christmas Bird Count, for a national biological data base. Consider these comments made on the House floor:

"It is hard to believe that an interest group could actually be one of the volunteers, that we could have the... Audubon Society... qualify as volunteers to go out and collect data. And in essence we are creating an environmental gestapo that will go on people's private property..." (Rep. Jack Fields, R-TX)

"Our complaint is that the volunteers, nonscience volunteers with a special agenda... are going to be part and parcel of... the survey. You start with bad science, you end up with bad science..." (Rep. Tauzin)

The House Members who supported this amendment insult the quality and integrity of volunteers whose efforts date back almost a century. If the opponents of the National Biological Survey have their way, the Secretary of the Interior would be prohibited from putting CBC results and other volunteer-generated bird data into a national database. This would be a disaster

Riverside and San Diego counties. The project is directed by MBO scientist Dr. Jon Atwood, who is widely recognized as a foremost authority on these species and coastal sage scrub conservation.

Volunteers will be needed from mid-February through mid-September to help in a variety of research capacities. Major project objectives include study (for both bird species) of: (a) distribution of breeding pairs; (b) dispersal behavior; (c) territory requirements and habitat preferences; (d) reproductive success; (e) adult survivorship; (f) foraging ecology; and (g) effects of habitat patch size on general patterns of biodiversity.

For further information, write Dr. Jon Atwood, MBO, P.O. Box 1770, Manomet, MA 02345, or call Palos Verdes Project Field Supervisor Jim Luttrell at (714) 892-4202.

for bird monitoring programs — CBCs and Breeding Bird Surveys, to name two — most of which rely heavily on volunteers in the field.

What You Can Do

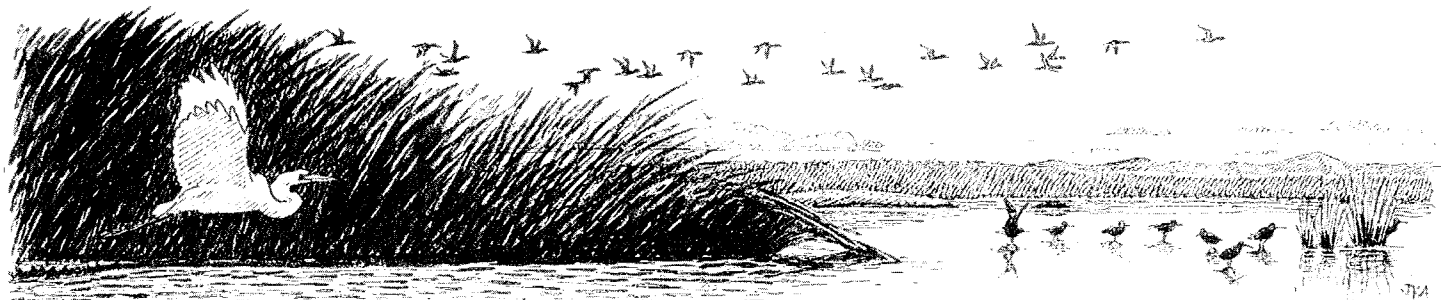
Tell your Senators and Representatives that you oppose the "volunteer provision" in H.R. 1845 as passed by the House, and ask them to support the use of volunteers to collect data that could be used in the NBS. You can write to them at:

Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
or
Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515.

If you prefer, call your Senators at (202) 224-3121 or Representatives at (202) 225-3121.

For More Information:

Stan Senner, Director
Migratory Bird Conservation Program
National Audubon Society
4150 Darley Avenue, Suite 5
Boulder, CO 80303.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

If we ask you, a reasonably well-educated person in Los Angeles, "What's an SEA?" chances are you'd probably draw a blank. As you skimmed through the back pages of the newspaper you might have noticed "SEA" in the headline of a small news item. But it was too much trouble to look it up: another pesky acronym you could do without.

Actually, SEAs can be pretty exciting and are well worth your full attention. SEAs are Significant Ecological Areas designated by Los Angeles County as open space of special value for native plants and wildlife that must be preserved from inappropriate development. They were included in the County's General Plan in 1980 — not because the Board of Supervisors had suddenly become environmentalists but because a successful lawsuit forced them to do so. On the surface it sounded wonderful: "... to preserve the County's ecological resources and habitat areas in as viable a natural condition as possible." Those of us with affection for lush canyons, neat wetlands and riparian woodlands took heart. Alas, we were soon disenchanted.

The Board was now in the hands of a conservative majority — Antonovich, Dana and Schabaram — that never met a developer it didn't like. They were unable to get rid of SEAs, but they weren't obligated to make them work. SEAs are almost all in private hands, and when the owner wanted to build homes the General Plan said they must be built "... at densities compatible with the resource values present."

Who decides what's compatible?

SEATAC, a Technical Advisory Committee of volunteer biologists, was set up to make this judgement. But SEATAC was never given any real clout; it can only advise and suggest. The Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors make all the decisions.

Over time, SEAs have gradually declined in quality. With increased population and the disappearance of land suitable for homes close to jobs, developers have reached out to more distant locations which is where many of the SEAs are. Permits for development were generously issued until some of the SEAs lost the values that made them special, significant. SEATAC has no way of knowing the physical condition of the SEAs. The County refused for years to pay for a study of the 61 SEAs until it broke down and hired one biologist who managed to evaluate seven in two years! The County is allowed to buy an SEA, but even in 1980 it was out of the question. The supervisors were not interested in public ownership of property and Prop. 13 had cut off the money anyway. Although federal and state agencies wanted to acquire SEAs — and had the funds — they received no encouragement or cooperation from the County.

What can be done to stop the eventual destruction of SEAs? Tough question. A Planning Commission and a Board of Supervisors that really give a damn would help. Changing the General Plan to further restrict development in SEAs might make a difference. Buying them outright would solve the problem. Unfortunately, the answer today is: none of the above. What about the courts? A number of law-

suits have been filed recently and that may indicate a way out. A strong challenge to the inadequate system of SEAs is called for — a test case that will establish genuine protection for natural habitats.

Years ago, the Santa Clara River, near what is now Magic Mountain, was a great birding spot. LAAS ran a field trip there every spring. Migrating warblers were a delight along with Blue Grosbeaks, orioles and White-tailed Kites. (As this is written, a few days after the Northridge earthquake, this splendid river is encountering oil from a broken pipe and chlorinated effluent from the Valencia water treatment plant. The river itself is SEA 23, has been partly channelized, and yet supports two endangered species: the unarmored three-spined stickleback and nesting Least Bell's Vireo. Four hundred fish have died, including the stickleback.)

As you approach the river coming from L.A. on I-5, you pass a marvelous stretch of undisturbed Valley Oaks. These elegant trees with their wide sweeping branches are surrounded by grassland that rises gently to form low, sensuous hills. Because this habitat is so scarce, 300 acres of it was designated SEA 64, Valley Oaks Savannah. There are some 1,200 oaks in the SEA, one of the last two remaining oak savannahs in Southern California. What many of us were secretly dreading for years finally came to pass: a project was proposed for almost 2,000 homes and a golf course for 200 acres of the SEA. L.A. County Parks and Recreation Department, SEATAC and even the staff of the County Planning De-

partment opposed the project, but the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors approved it anyway. A suit was filed by environmentalists charging inconsistencies with the General Plan, the lack of proper monitoring and inadequate mitigation in the SEA under the California Environmental Quality Act. In June 1993, the court agreed that the project would generate excessive air pollution and overtax school and library facilities. Unfortunately, the judge did not rule on the most important issue: the refusal of the County to adhere to its own General Plan.

The case was appealed. A favorable decision would indeed establish the precedent that the County must honor the spirit of the General Plan. A victory would mean the possible rescue of all SEAs from inevitable oblivion. Unhappily, a procedural error by the plaintiffs threw the case out and the opportunity was lost. Bad luck but not the end of the world. Another lawsuit is in the offing on SEA 64. Let us hope for ultimate victory. —

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.


F I E L D T R I P S

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Springs — (619) 767-5501. Limited to 20 participants. Send SASE with \$5 fee to LAAS to learn 7:00 A.M. meeting place and more details.


Saturday and Sunday, March 19 and 20 — 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 Golden Eagle are all to be expected. Limited to 16 participants. Reserve with a \$10 check per policy. Include SASE for lodging list and 7:30 A.M. Saturday meeting location in Big Pine.

Saturday, March 26 — L.A. Zoo Tour. **Guy Commeau** will show off the diversity of feathered, furred and scaled fauna of our city's zoo. His familiarity with mammals and birds as well as the operations of the zoo should make this a memorable outing. Meet at 9:30 A.M. at the main gate. Picnic or buy lunch, and continue in the afternoon if you like. Binoculars will be helpful. Zoo fees: adults \$7, children \$3 (group rates may apply).

 **Sunday, March 27 — From San Pedro on the *R.V. Vantuna*, 7:30 A.M.—3:30 P.M.** Call LAAS for reservations. Leaders **Mitch Heindel** and **Barney Schlinger**. Fee: \$25.

Saturday, April 2 — Van Norman Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá** or **Doug Martin**. Meet at 7:30 A.M. See March 5 write-up for details.


Friday to Monday, April 8 to 11 — Northern Baja Adventure. Leader **Dexter Kelly**. Call LAAS for more information.


 **Friday, April 8 — From Ventura on the *M.V. Vanguard*.** 30-hour trip departs at 10:00 P.M. Call LAAS for reservations. Leaders **Arnold Small** and **Mitch Heindel**.


Saturday, April 9 — Chatsworth Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. Grassland/oak scrub habitat with a large body of water. Migrants should start appearing, and nesting birds will be singing. Take the 405 Fwy N to Roscoe Blvd. and head W to Fallbrook Ave. Take this N to the DWP entrance at the end. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at the gate. Finish up early afternoon. Bring lunch and water. No restrooms.

Sunday, April 10 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. **Second Sunday this month only.** Meet at 8:00 A.M. See March 6 write-up for details.

Saturday, April 16 — Franklin Canyon. Leader **Steve Saffier**. Franklin Canyon is located between Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 100 species of birds have been seen in the chaparral, lakeside and oak/pine woodland habitats of the canyon. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at the Sooky Goldman Nature Center. From the 101 Fwy in the Valley, take Coldwater S into the hills and make a 90° right turn at the ridge onto Franklin Canyon Dr. (not a through street). Continue ½ mile to the Nature Center. The lot is past a gate designating the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom.

 **Friday, April 22 — From Ventura on the *M.V. Vanguard*.** 30-hour trip departs at 10:00 P.M. Call LAAS for reservations. Leaders **Brad Schram** and **Mitch Heindel**.

 **Friday, April 29 — From Ventura on the *M.V. Vanguard*** (backup trip for April 8 or April 22, if needed). Leaders **Brad Schram** and **Mitch Heindel**.

 **Saturday, May 21 — From San Pedro on the *R.V. Vantuna*, 6:00 A.M.—6:00 A.M.** Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Bank. Leaders **Kimball Garrett** and **Barney Schlinger**. Fee: \$37. —



EVENING MEETING

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

March 8, 1994

Dan George
Director of the Bausch & Lomb Birding Council
Birding Optics

ID Workshop: TBA

Dan George will present a program on how binoculars and spotting scopes work and how to choose optics for the "right reasons."

April 12, 1994

Dr. Charles Collins
The Santa Cruz Island Scrub Jay

To speciate or not to speciate... could you repeat the question? Dr. Collins will delight and amaze us with an illustrated account of his research on this distinctive relative of our pugnacious coastal form.

F I E L D T R I P S

Before setting out on any field trip, please 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**

Saturday, March 5 — Van Norman Reservoir. Leader **Dustin Alcala** or **Doug Martin**.

Riparian and grassland habitat surround the reservoir and adjacent ponds. 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. Allow for possible construction in the area. Restrooms on-site.

Sunday, March 6 — Topanga State Park. **Gerry Haigh** will lead participants through this diverse coastal mountain area spared by last fall's fires. An ideal trip for a beginning birder or someone new in the area. A botanist is usually present. 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 turn left into the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$5 parking fee.

Saturday and Sunday, March 12 and 13 — Anza Borrego with **Fred Heath**. The spring explosion of desert flora and fauna should be well under way in the desert. Suggested accommodations: Tamarisk Grove Campground [reserve through Mistix — (800) 444-7275] or Stanlund Motel in Borrego

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