

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society



Caught in the Flood of

URBANIZATION

by E. N. Anderson
Starling by John Schmitt

For almost thirty years I have lived and worked in the east end of the city of Riverside and in neighboring Moreno Valley. During most of this period, the area has had the dubious distinction of being the fastest growing part of the United States.

The area was not exactly a pristine wilderness. Farming and small-town growth had long ago eliminated the antelope, Prairie Falcons and other sensitive species. But in 1966, when I moved here, the area still supported a complex, diverse and self-sustaining network of life. The valley was cultivated, but introduced and some native grasses abounded. The hills were covered with sage scrub below about 2,700' and chaparral higher



All Photos by Herb Clarke

up. Canyons held sycamores and a few willows. Olive and citrus orchards had been enthusiastically accepted by nesting birds.

Urbanization has not been total. Thanks to the heroic efforts of a small group of people, much of the best of this small world has been saved in the Box Springs Mountains and Sycamore Canyon county parks. The east end of Moreno Valley is still open land and holds the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, now one of the finest birding places in southern California. Most of the hills are still open, and we are trying to get them into formal protected status. The Stephens kangaroo rat and California Gnatcatcher have been declared endangered, and this has led to some (alas, sometimes heavy-handed and maladministered) check on development.

Thus, tough and adaptable species have found ways to cope. Dis-

placed marsh hawks found a home in the San Jacinto Wildlife Area. Coyotes, predictably, are as common as ever. Scrub Jays, Anna's Hummingbirds, crows and mockingbirds have increased. Band-tailed Pigeons colonized Riverside when the great storms of early 1969 forced them out of the mountains, and they are there still, in spite of occasional heavy predation by Cooper's Hawks. Even roadrunners, which somehow don't look like a survivor type to me, are as common as ever. They seem to enjoy hunting in large gardens. Best of all, Cactus Wrens — not native to the area — have colonized yucca-and-cactus dryscaping in my northeast Riverside suburb and have raised large families. Garden plantings make all the difference in the world.

Brown (all right, "California") Towhees soldier on. I used to think of them as dull, stodgy birds until I watched my backyard pair successfully fight off a particularly large and fierce cat that was about to eat their baby — an accomplishment equivalent to a pair of humans fighting off a hyperactive tyrannosaur. I have also seen local pairs come back into a burn before the ground was fully cool and survive there to raise young the next spring. Brown Towhees survive through indomitable courage and resourcefulness, and they need it all these days.

What have we lost? The worst loss is the natural grassland and sage scrub. Houses took the former. The latter succumbed to fire and air pollution. It has been replaced by weedy aliens, especially cheat grasses and wild mustards. These sprout with the first fall rains, whereas the sage scrub species sprout only after heavier winter rain falls. The aliens also seem less susceptible to smog. Thus, after a fire or disturbance, the aliens take over, crowding out the natives from all but the most barren and inhospitable spots. The solid

sage scrub cover is down to a few widely scattered bushes. Some species have been eliminated from the area. Wildflowers have decreased well over 90%; some have vanished entirely.

As urbanization proceeded, the first animals to go were the rarer predators, including badgers and long-tailed weasels. Bobcats still occur in the farther hills, but no longer in my area. Golden Eagles nested as recently as 1979; I watched the harried father frantically rustle food for a daughter a third larger than he was. (It is sadly probable that they were among the dozens of eagles killed by the giant windmill-farms in San Geronio Pass. These wind power generators are the result of environmentalists' agitation for "clean" power. Once again we are reminded that stupid friends are worse than smart enemies.)

Among birds, the grassland birds are most affected. Loggerhead Shrikes and meadowlarks are few where they once abounded. Burrowing Owls, once abundant, are now down to a very few in protected areas. Grasshopper Sparrows are about gone; they and Lark Sparrows used to nest in the long grass that grew where houses now stand. White-tailed Kites, initially absent from the area, colonized it for a time in the 1970s and '80s; they nested in the orchards and hunted the mice and crickets displaced by bulldozers. When the orchards fell and urbanization slowed, the kites departed. Lawrence's Goldfinches, too, increased with orchard and farm plantings but have decreased again, though they are still found.



The sage scrub birds are quite resilient. The change from brush to weedy annuals eliminated most of the sage sparrows, but other species (such as Rufous-crowned and Black-chinned sparrows) seem to flourish. Bewick's Wrens are far fewer on the hills, but they did not die out — they moved into garden shrubbery in the expanding suburbs.

The worst damage was suffered by the "herps." Moreno Valley used to be a paradise for herp-watchers. The transient ponds were full of spadefoot toads. Red racers five or six feet long actively hunted over the dirt roads. Two very local species, the red diamondback rattlesnake and the orange-throated whiptail, occur from here southward through the interior moun-



tains into Baja California; both were once abundant. Pacific horned lizards hunted ants in the valley dust. Western skinks foraged wherever there was good leaf litter. Rosy boas were abundant in the hills.

Most of these are gone, victims of urbanization, pet collecting and cats. A few individuals of most of these species can still be found but only in remote areas after active search. More adaptable species — including king snakes, alligator lizards, striped racers and gopher snakes — survive but are decreasing.

The granite spiny lizard, bluebelly ("western fence lizard") and side-blotched lizard are still common — but less so every year. Cats are probably the main reason. Cats appear to have been single-handedly responsible for the disappearance of the horned lizard, otherwise a tame, adaptable creature. I

love cats, but I must say I have a problem with some cat owners. Many of the latter, even some who consider themselves environmentalists, are very proud of their pets' hunting abilities, and boast to me of the number of lizards and birds done in every week. If I politely say something about it, they remind me that it's "perfectly natural" for a cat to hunt. Well, it's perfectly natural for dogs to bite, too, but dog owners learn to keep their dogs from biting neighbor kids and stock. Our family has had many a nonhunting cat. There is no excuse for turning untrained, unbelled cats loose in areas where endangered and highly cat-vulnerable species exist.

The same forces — urbanization and cats — have thinned out not only the Stephens kangaroo rat, but also less media-attracting species. Western harvest mice used to collect the peanuts from my garden, as well as other seeds; I haven't seen one in decades. The desert shrew, always rare, now seems to be gone. Even the most resilient species, the pack rats and desert deermice, are much rarer.

Insects are rarer than they used to be. Butterflies have become rare in proportion to the loss of native flowers. Other arthropods are all far less common; thus, of course, all the food chain suffers.

Was all this necessary? Of course not. In addition to cats, wild dogs, burros and pigs have caused problems; all could have been controlled. Parks and wildlife corridors could have been more extensive. Planning would have produced greener cities with enough open space to allow humans and wildlife to coexist. Above all, decent education (which we "can't afford") would have taught children, through field experience, what they had and were losing. Even minimal contact with kangaroo rats, for instance, would have let the citizens see through the "rats or people" rhetoric generated by

dishonest developers.

Moreno Valley, in particular, has consistently chosen to reject planning and environmental agendas whenever possible. The people sought to keep house prices and taxes low. This is a laudable enough goal, but Moreno Valley indulged in false economy. Skimping on police, schools and urban services, as well as environmental amenities, led to skyrocketing crime and violence and to falling home values. Los Angeles gangs, seeing a social vacuum, moved in to fill it. Californians seem unable to learn that social and environmental investment is *necessary*. "There ain't no free lunch," or, as they say around the Mediterranean, "Take what you want, then pay for it, says God." Moreno Valley is paying a terrible price.

All is not lost, and the area is still surprisingly full of life. I can only express my deepest thanks to those few who have saved so much, and hope that their efforts inspire more action.

But horned lizards, Grasshopper Sparrows, wild bees and many other humble lives will not be back. Here at the eye of the development hurricane I have seen a rich, if low-key and little-appreciated, world of small lives fade before my eyes. Goodbye, my loves; goodbye, my friends and companions. The world is enormously poorer by your loss — even for the thousands who never noticed you. —



E. N. Anderson, University of California Riverside, Department of Anthropology.



The Fire Last Time... and Next Time

by Larry Allen

Swift-moving fires consuming tinder-dry chaparral are familiar sights in southern California's foothills and mountains. A year ago, such a fire moving through the Santa Monica Mountains and down to the sea consumed about 18,000 acres (approximately 16%) of the area covered by the Malibu Christmas Bird Count (CBC) circle.

system in the Malibu burn area. First, the fire intensity seems to have been not so extreme as to kill the rootstalks. Although much of the above-ground vegetation in the fire area seems to have been utterly destroyed, shoots were erupting at the bases of many chaparral plants within six weeks (Photo 1).

Second is the "patchiness" of the fire. Within the fire boundaries are

around structures have often survived (including several instances where the structures themselves did not). These patches of surviving habitat can provide refugia for the support of animal life, and sources of seed for regeneration of vegetation. (Of course, the burn itself is but a patch in the larger chaparral community. See Pickett, S.T.A. and P. S. White, eds., *The Ecology of Natural Disturbances and Patch Dynamics* for a discussion of the importance of patchiness in natural environments.)

Last year's Malibu CBC occurred



1. Regenerating chaparral in Las Flores Canyon, February, 1994.



2. View northeast from Piuma Road near Monte Nido, February, 1994.



3. Unburned riparian growth in Tuna Canyon, February, 1994.

The "official" cause of the fire, now named the Calabasas-Malibu fire, is listed as arson, but the ultimate cause is the millennia-old adaptation of chaparral to fire. These adaptations include a tolerance of low rainfall and prolonged droughts, highly flammable stems and leaves, rootstalks which can survive the heat of a burn (if the intensity is not too great), seeds which may require the heat of fire to germinate, and tolerance of poor soil conditions (since ash and unburned duff are often washed away by the winter rains following the fire season). All these adaptations ensure that chaparral is the climax vegetation in its particular ecological niche.

Two characteristics of the fire are relevant to the recovery of the eco-

areas of intact habitat: unburned patches of chaparral can be found in canyon bottoms and on northwest facing slopes (Photo 2), areas of oak woodland several acres in extent remain in Tuna Canyon, riparian growth has been scorched but not destroyed in several canyons (Photo 3), and non-native plantings

six weeks after the fire and provides some data with which to assess the impact of the fire upon the bird life within and adjacent to the fire zone. Counts were conducted in four count sub-areas completely within the fire boundaries and five sub-areas partially within the burn area, for the most part by observers who

had covered the same areas on prior counts. The rather surprising results for these two sub-sets, and the count circle as a whole, are summarized in the table.

I hesitate to speculate why species diversity and total individuals reported within and adjacent to the burn area should increase, but I can think of a few reasons: individual birds might be more visible in the reduced cover, they might have to forage longer or more widely if

AREA	1993 COUNT		1990-92 3-YEAR AVERAGE
	TOTAL	% OF AVERAGE	
COUNT CIRCLE			
Species	153	93%	164
Individuals	31,422	109%	28,898
BURNED AREAS			
Species	73	116%	63
Individuals	2,010	112%	1,799
PARTIAL BURN			
Species	114	103%	111
Individuals	4,291	126%	3,406

the fire destroyed food sources, or perhaps the fire area attracted birds by uncovering seeds previously hidden by foliage or duff. I'm sure you have some ideas as well. However, it is unwise to base an assessment of the fire's impact on one CBC alone. Aside from the fact that Christmas Counts in general are not truly "random" samples, last year's Malibu count is confounded by a number of other changes which have taken place between 1993 and prior years: it was the first count following the end of the several-year drought, there was the disruption associated with the utility construction at the PCH bridge at Malibu Lagoon, and there has been additional real estate development throughout the area.

This year's count, to be held on December 18, will give us another look at the birdlife in the count circle, give us a chance to examine the expected rebound in plant and animal life, and perhaps give us greater ability to distinguish the effects of each of the habitat-impacting events of the recent past. Just as importantly, the CBC survey in the unburned portion of the count circle provides a baseline for comparison when the inevitable fire brings destruction—and then regeneration—to a different area of the chaparral.

By participating in this year's Malibu count you can share in the excitement of discovery, explore new areas or revisit favorite ones, be eligible for the (in)famous *prize* awarded annually for "best bird," and, as *special additional inducement*, will be first in line for your choice of Santa Monica Mountains survey blocks for the L.A. County Breeding Bird Atlas!

I will be talking to those of you who have joined us on prior counts, but more help is needed. Don't be concerned if you are unsure of your bird identification talents—I can place you in a team with more experienced birders. So no excuses: if you would like to share in the camaraderie and discovery of the 1994 Malibu Christmas Count, give me a call at (213) 221-2022. 🐦

1994–95 Local Christmas Counts

Antelope Valley

Saturday, December 17

Compiler Fred Heath (310) 826-0083

Catalina

Sunday, December 18th

Co-compilers:

Misty Gay (310) 510-0954

Lee Jones (619) 379-1543

Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, which have recently been re-introduced, may be seen. Participants also have a rare opportunity to explore the seldom visited rugged interior of the island.

Malibu

Sunday, December 18th

Compiler Larry Allen (213) 221-2022

Grass Mountain

Monday, December 26th

Compiler Cal Yorke (805) 270-0222

San Fernando Valley

Monday, December 26th

Compiler Art Langton (818) 887-0973

Los Angeles

Date and compiler will be noted on the Bird Tape (213) 874-1318

California Duck Days '95

The National Audubon Society is co-sponsoring "California Duck Days '95 — A Wetlands Festival in the Heart of the Pacific Flyway." The festival will be held February 16–20, 1995, in and around Davis, Yolo County. Last year's festival drew 1,200 participants, many of whom viewed over 1/4 million Snow Geese, both eagle species, four species of falcons, thousands of Sandhill Cranes, and impressive numbers of other waterbird and landbird species.

Quality field trips, averaging 15–25 participants, to outstanding winter birding areas within two hours of Davis will be offered. Some of North America's largest concentrations of waterfowl and other wintering bird species will be found on field trips to private and public wetlands and uplands including the Sacramento River/San Joaquin River Delta, Sacramento Valley State and National Wildlife Refuges (i.e., Gray Lodge and Sacramento), and BobElaine Sanctuary. Field trips will be led by volunteers from National, Sacramento, San Joaquin

and Yolo Audubon Societies, among others.

Among the 200–300 avifaunal species present in spectacular numbers at this time of year are Whistling Swans, Snow and Ross' Geese, dabbling and diving ducks, 16 species of hawks, eagles and falcons (including up to 35 Swainson's Hawks wintering on and over the Delta) and Sandhill Cranes.

Although entertainment, speakers, special events and workshops will be concentrated on the Presidents' Day weekend (Friday night through Monday), Yolo Audubon Society will kickoff Duck Days '95 with a program on Thursday, February 16, entitled *Yolo Basin Wetlands and Waterfowl* presented by noted ornithologist, Dr. Ted Beedy.

For more information, write or call:

California Duck Days '95

P.O. Box 5000-141

Davis, CA 95617

(800) 425-5001

Or contact:

Bob Barnes

Audubon Western Region

555 Audubon Place

Sacramento, CA 95825

Tel: (916) 481-5332

Fax: (916) 481-6228 🐦

The Mensuration of Angels

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

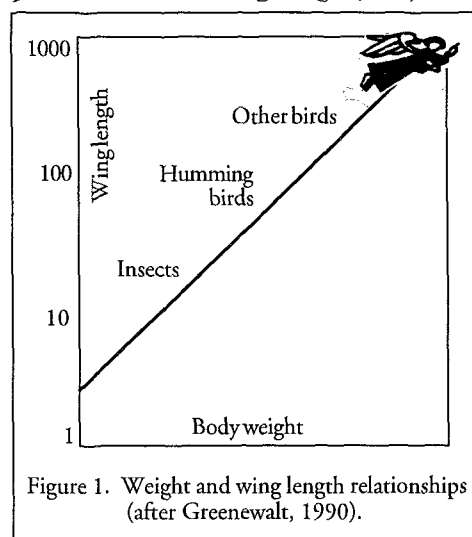
The literature of ornithology is vast. I've spent a lifetime attempting to keep abreast of some of its content... not an easy job. In studying (not researching) the nature of color for my article on that subject, I came upon the subject of angels in Crawford Greenewalt's *Hummingbirds*, 1990 reprint, Dover Publications.

Greenewalt was a birder, the former president of DuPont Corporation and, apparently, an engineer. This wonderful book (available at the LAAS Bookstore for \$15.95), presents, in Chapter 3, the mechanics of flight of animals from insects to birds in mathematical, physical and anatomical detail (Greenewalt did not include bats or pterosaurs in his study). From these data, he extrapolated the dimensions of an hypothetical, winged angel. He did not analyze Michelangelo's Sistine

Chapel angels that apparently levitate.


Facts: (1) There is a straight line relationship between body weight and wing length of gnats (insects) to hummingbirds and other flying birds; i.e., the heavier the beast, the longer the wing (Fig. 1). Interestingly, wing length was measured from the tip to the first articulated joint: the shoulder in hummers (the wing bones are fused!) and the wrist in other vertebrates.

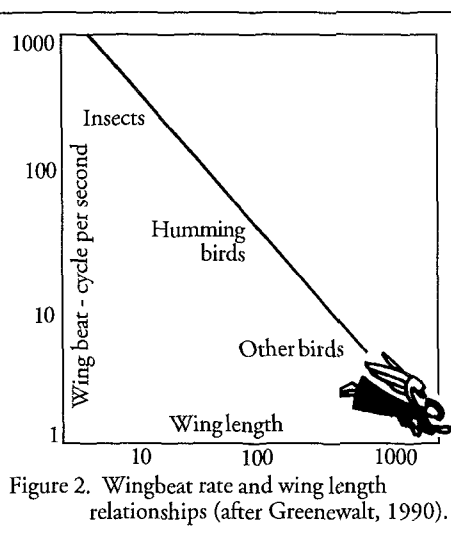
(2) The rate of wing beats, in cycles per second, is inversely proportional to the wing length; i.e.,



the longer the wing, the slower the wing beat (Fig. 2).

From these figures, he projected the measurements of an hypothetical, 150 pound angel as follows: (1) It would need a wrist-to-wing tip length of four feet and (2) It would fly with a wing beat of one per second! A basic assumption in this, of course, is that the anatomy of angels obeys the laws of nature, an assumption based on He who made them. It is too bad that the shepherds did not have a meter stick, scales or take good field notes.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! 



Bluebirds Stop Singing the Blues

The National Audubon Society's Western Region Birds in the Balance Campaign announces the initiation of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. This program is in response to a request from, and followup with, Don Yoder of Mount Diablo Audubon Society who is on the National Board of Directors of the North American Bluebird Society.

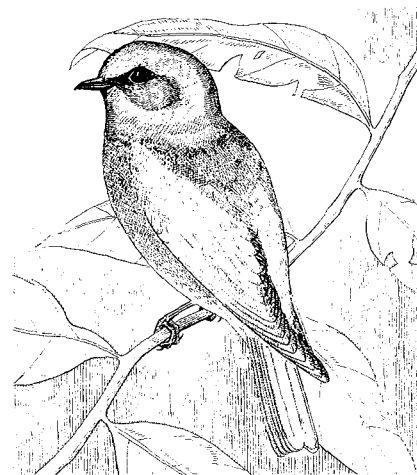
"Many states," says Mr. Yoder, "have active Bluebird programs. I've wanted to see an organization step forward to help establish a network connecting people who want to promote the welfare of Bluebirds in California. National Audubon's positive response is very much appreci-

ated. Now we can get started."

Audubon's Bob Barnes adds, "To start, we want to hear from anyone who is doing anything with Bluebirds in California... what are you doing? where? why? and how? Then we are going to have a newsletter that shares information on Bluebirds. Some information will come from experts, but most will come from our readers. The program will expand according to interest and resources."


Barnes further states, "What is so appropriate is that the California Bluebird Recovery Program is truly reflective of Audubon's roots in the world of birds."

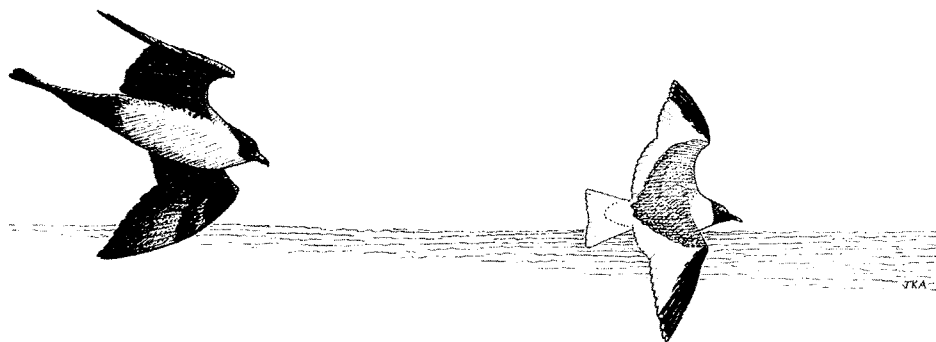
To be a part of, or for more infor-



mation on, the California Bluebird Recovery Program, contact:

California Bluebird Recovery Program

Birds in the Balance Campaign
National Audubon Society
555 Audubon Place
Sacramento, CA 95825
Tel: (916) 481-5332
Fax: (916) 481-6228 



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1995 Pelagic Trip Schedule

Friday Night, February 3 —
30-hour trip departs 10:00 P.M. Fri-
day; returns 4:00 A.M. Sunday. From
Ventura on Island Packer's
M.V. Vanguard, NW past Point Con-
ception to Arquello Canyon and W
to the California continental shelf
with several daylight hours along
the shelf. \$250/double bunk,
\$145/single bunk (meals included).

Sunday, February 26 — 8-hour
trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San
Pedro to the Palos Verdes Escarp-
ment and Redondo Canyon. \$25.

Friday Night, April 21 — 30-hour
trip departs 10:00 P.M. Friday;
returns 4:00 A.M. Sunday. From
Ventura on Island Packer's
M.V. Vanguard, NW past Point Con-
ception to Arquello Canyon and W
to the California continental shelf
with several daylight hours along
the shelf. \$250/double bunk,
\$145/single bunk (meals included).

Saturday, May 13 — 12-hour trip
out of Ventura to Anacapa, Santa
Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands. Full
galley on board. \$60.

Sunday, May 21 — 12-hour trip on
the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San Pedro
to Santa Barbara Island and the
Osborne Bank. \$37.

Sunday, September 17 — 12-hour
trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San
Pedro to Santa Barbara Island and
the Osborne Bank. \$37.

Saturday, September 30 —
17-hour trip out of Ventura on the
M.V. Vanguard. Land on San
Miguel Island after birding adjacent
waters. Dinner included. \$90.

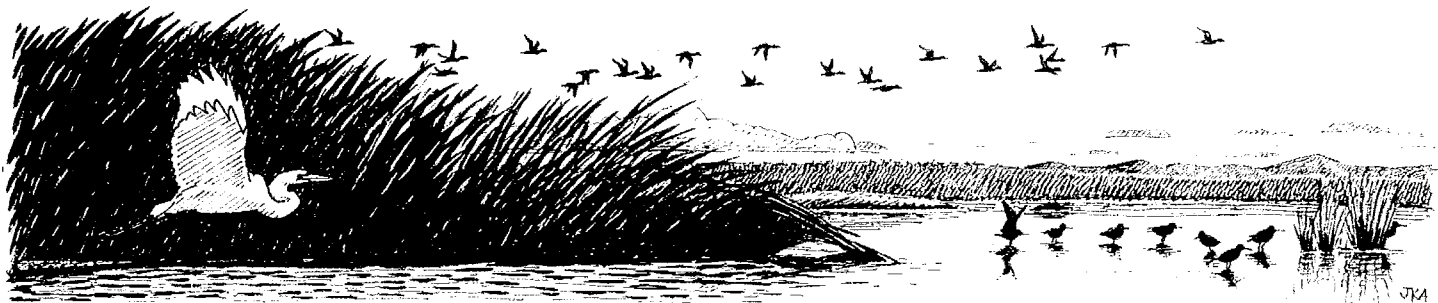
Saturday, October 7 — 12-hour
trip out of Ventura to Anacapa,
Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz Islands.
Full galley on board. \$60.

Saturday, October 21 — 12-hour
trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San
Pedro to Santa Barbara Island and
the Osborne Bank. \$37.

Saturday, November 18 — 8-hour
trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San
Pedro to the Palos Verdes Escarp-
ment and Redondo Canyon. \$25.

Friday, November 24 — 30-hour
trip departs 10:00 P.M. Friday; re-
turns 4:00 A.M. Sunday. From
Ventura on Island Packer's
M.V. Vanguard, NW past Point Con-
ception to Arquello Canyon and W
to the California continental shelf
with several daylight hours along
the shelf. \$250/double bunk,
\$145/single bunk (meals included).





CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

At last — VICTORY! Wonderful news. Mono Lake is liberated from the thrall of Los Angeles' thirst. After 17 years of determined, untiring effort, the Mono Lake Committee and environmentalists all over America have won a splendid battle. On Wednesday, September 28, 1994 — a day to remember — the California State Water Resources Control Board voted unanimously to cut off virtually all water from Mono Lake's tributary streams to the city of Los Angeles for 20 years. At that time the level of the lake should reach 6,391 feet above sea level, 17 feet above its present height. This is an unbelievable decision by the Board. It is what environmentalists have been searching for, for these many years: enough water in this astonishing natural wonder to not only prevent its demise but to return it to its former glory.

For those who came in late, let's go back to the beginning. Mono Lake is a spectacular 100 square mile saline, alkaline lake west of Yosemite National Park. It is fed by five creeks carrying torrents of clear water down from the snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada. As with most desert lakes, there is no outlet. When its water evaporates, the salts and minerals remain.

Over the centuries Mono Lake has become twice as salty as the ocean and ten times as alkaline. It supports no fish but untold numbers of tiny brine shrimp and alkali flies. For thousands of years this delectable free lunch has attracted millions of birds: sandpipers, avocets, phalaropes, grebes, plovers, ducks and gulls. In its prime, Mono

Lake during migration has seen one million Eared Grebes — the largest concentration in North America — and 100,000 Wilson's Phalaropes, 30% of the world's population. Fifty thousand California Gulls have nested there, 95% of the entire California breeding population.

In the first decade of this century, William Mulholland built the aqueduct that changed the destiny of the city of Los Angeles. In 1913, when Mulholland opened the pipeline gates in Los Angeles and said, "There it is, take it," he ushered in the birth of a new megalopolis in the desert of southern California. The water came from agricultural Owens Valley. Owens Lake, the Owens River and even the underground aquifers were ruthlessly tapped, effectively destroying a rich farming community.

In 1941, the Los Angeles Aqueduct was extended to the pristine creeks that fed Mono Lake, 300 miles north of the city. All the water from four of the five major streams was taken, resulting in the gradual shrinking of the lake, increasing its salinity and exposing its shores to a barren crust of powdery sand. When the winds blew, the dried "bathtub ring" of the lake was caught up to form alkaline dust storms that obscured the view and threatened the health of man and beast.

Then there was the health of California Gulls. The receding shoreline exposed the nesting islands of the lake to land bridges that permitted predators like coyotes, weasels and raccoons to cross over and devour the chicks. In the late '70s, the population of gulls fell from 46,000 to 11,000. Migrating



ducks became few and far between as the rising concentration of chemicals increased.



David Gaines was an avid birder. While still in high school he compiled the Birds of the Season page in the *Western Tanager*. He had always been fascinated with Mono Lake and Yosemite and at one point wrote an excellent book of bird distribution, *Birds of the Yosemite Sierra*. In the late '70s, realizing that Mono Lake was going downhill with no help in sight, he decided that something had to be done to save it. With a small group of like-minded people he formed the Mono Lake Committee. They were all amateurs, mostly young and eager to get to work.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is a huge, powerful, quasi-independent bureaucracy whose mission is to supply the city with all the water it can get. It refused to discuss losing 15% of its water for remote Mono Lake.

The Committee met with several environmental organizations and it was decided to bring a lawsuit against the DWP. National Audubon, Los Angeles Audubon and Friends of the Earth joined the suit and a prestigious San Francisco law firm volunteered pro bono work. L.A. Audubon was proud to be a party to this effort; we contributed over \$50,000 to the lengthy struggle. It was well worth it.

The Committee made contacts far and wide. Slide programs were given to local chapters of environmental organizations. There was publicity in the press and on TV. Over the years Mono Lake became a

national cause; bumper stickers appeared on cars all over the country. *LIFE* magazine had a feature article with great photography and a spectacular cover in living color.

David Gaines was an unusual man. He was articulate and eloquent and he spoke with quiet conviction. There was an aura of unsailable sincerity about him that



moved people. His cause was just and the manifest selflessness of his presence was a powerful weapon. Yet he once wrote that "We must think of ourselves not as fighters but as healers." After his tragic death in an auto accident in 1988 there were many tributes in the California media. Duane Georgeson, the formidable DWP spokesman who crossed swords with David many times, expressed his sorrow and praised him as a gentleman and a worthy opponent.

In the 15 years since the suit

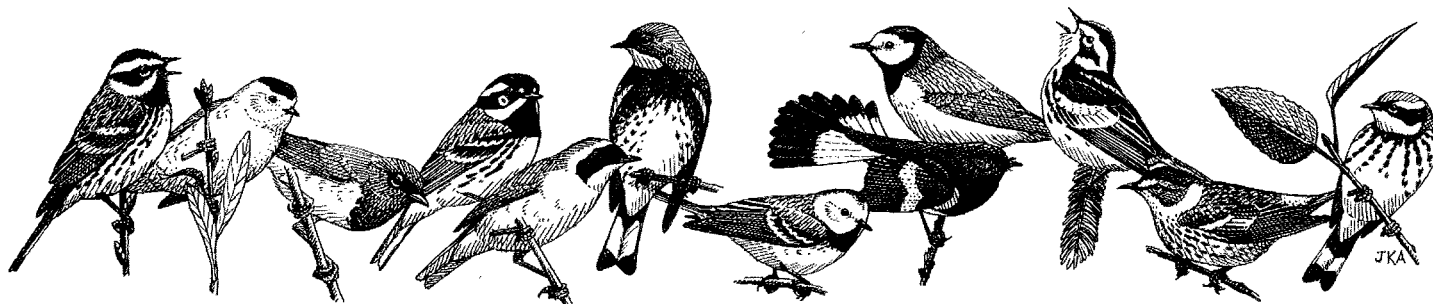
was filed there have been many scientific studies of the lake and its wildlife, seven different courts heard the arguments, and state and federal legislatures became involved. The Committee grew in numbers and enthusiasm, developing innovative programs to spread the word and attract the attention of the public to the grandeur of

Mono Lake and its perilous future. California Trout joined the litigation, deeply concerned about the loss of fisheries in the diverted creeks.

From the beginning, the basis for legal action was the ancient Roman Public Trust Doctrine that says that the state must protect public land for the use of the public. In 1983, the California Supreme Court agreed with that position. Since then, the State Water Resources Control Board has been weighing the public trust values of Mono Lake and the water requirements of Los Angeles.

And — wonder of wonders — we've won! A much-needed shot in the arm in a worrisome time for the environment. It celebrates the vision and the staying power of the Mono Lake Committee, Audubon

and all the good people who helped to save an irreplaceable national treasure. The DWP has at last changed from a surly giant to an understanding, accepting citizen. Dennis Tito, president of the Board of Water and Power commissioners, said, "The time has come to accept the state's judgement and move on, to work together constructively to establish reliable supplies to replace water that is being dedicated to preserve the Mono Basin environment. We commit the Department to this effort." Hallelujah! ➤



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

December is Christmas Count month. All over the hemisphere and in the South Pacific thousands of participants are involved in what is perhaps the largest scientific inventory in the world. Here are the most recent available statistics from *American Birds* Volume 47, Number 4, about the 93rd Count (1992): "... a record high 1,668 counts were conducted by 43,189 observers (36,250 in the field and 6,939 at feeders; 1,621 [counts] were in North America and 47 were in tropical regions. In Canada and the United States, 54,067,685 birds of 637 species and 36 listed forms were tallied; on tropical counts, 231,864 birds of 1,405 species were located."

L.A. Audubon traditionally sponsors the Antelope Valley, Malibu and Los Angeles counts. Elsewhere in the *Tanager* are details of these and other counts. Everyone, no matter what your expertise, is encouraged to participate. A tip: try to get your assignment as early as possible so you can scout your area in advance. There is a bit of competition between the counts, so you will endear yourself to your count coordinator if you stake out something unusual.

Mid-September to mid-October turn up the greatest number of vagrants of the fall. This year was no exception. An **American Bittern**, no longer as common in southern California as it used to be, was reported from Sepulveda Basin on 2 October (Irwin Woldman).

David Koeppel seems to have stumbled upon a hawk watch location. Unfortunately the site,

Cucamonga Peak, is reached only after a four-hour hike (a wilderness permit is required). Among the many raptors David saw on 2 October was a **Broad-winged Hawk**.

A **Solitary Sandpiper** was seen along Malibu Creek in Tapia Park on 20 September (Bob Pann). Two inland reports of **Common Tern** occurred on 25 September, one from Apollo Lake, Lancaster (Charles Hood), and the other from Galileo Park near California City (Matt Heindel). A **Black Tern** was seen at the Ventura Sewage Ponds on 23 September (Gail Hightower).



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

A flock of some 10,000 **Vaux's Swifts** roosted in downtown Los Angeles in late September (Kimball Garrett). A **Lewis Woodpecker** invasion is under way this winter. Reports include one at Cheseboro Canyon on 7 October (Bob Dickenson), one at Thousand Palms Oasis on 9 October (Bob Moramarco), and three at

Cheseboro on 16 October (Robert Weissler). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was at Galileo Park on 11 October (Herb & Olga Clarke and Arnold Small), and a **Williamson's Sapsucker** was found at Veteran's Park, Sylmar, on 8 October (Doug Martin).

Three **Tropical Kingbirds** were found locally this fall — one at Huntington Beach Central Park on 1 October (Doug Willick), one at Banning Park, Los Angeles, on 16 October (Tom Wurster), and the third at Sand Dune Park, Manhattan Beach, on 17 October (Mitch Heindel). Also found at Sand Dune Park was a **Bendire's Thrasher** on 2 October (Mike San Miguel and TW).

A rare visitor from Mexico, a **Yellow-green Vireo**, was at Banning Park on 16–17 October (MiH).

Vagrant warblers included a **Northern Parula** at Zuma Canyon on 24 September (KG) and another in Costa Mesa on 29 September (Robb Hamilton), a **Chestnut-sided** at Zuma Canyon on 24 September (KG), a **Magnolia** at Sepulveda Basin on 27 September (BP), **Black-Throated Blues** at Desert Center on 9 October (BM), at Furnace Creek on 11 October (Olga Clarke) and at Whaley Park, Long Beach, on 16 October (MSM), and a **Black-burnian** at Harbor Park on 20 September (Kevin Larson). A **Black-and-white** at Peck Park (MSM), a **Prothonotary** found in Allan Keller's garden in Northridge on 18 October, a **Worm-eating** at Banning Park on 15–16 October (MiH & KL), an **Ovenbird** at Sand Dune Park on 3 October (KL), a

Kentucky at Galileo on 22 September (MaH), **Hooded Warblers** at Furnace Creek on 30 September (Brian Daniels) and on 16 October (Vernon Howe), a **Canada** at Harbor Park on 15 October (MiH & KL), and a **Painted Redstart** in Costa Mesa on 26 September (DW).

A female **Hepatic Tanager** found at Veteran's Park, Sylmar, in October (DM) may have been a return of last year's bird. A **Dickcissel** was at Furnace Creek on 30 September (BrianD), a **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** was seen at Point Mugu State Park on 18 October (Bob Hefter), a **Bobolink** overflowed the mouth of Zuma Creek on 24 September (KG), and a **Red Crossbill** was in the pines at Veteran's Park, Sylmar, on 8 October (DM).

I would like to thank all of you who, in 1994, have made your sightings available to be used in this column. Without your reports there would be no column.

Also many thanks to my editor, Jean Brandt, to Kimball Garrett who reviews each column, to Arnold

Small whose store of California records has finally become available to everyone in his just-published book *California Birds — Their Status and Distribution*, and last but not most of all to my wife, Priscilla, who has endured with infinite patience all of this for more years than we would like to admit.

Good Birding and Happy Holidays! 🐦

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

27½ Mast Street, Marina Del Rey, CA 90292.
(310) 827-0407 E-Mail: hankb@kaiwan.com
Or call **David Koeppel** at (818) 784-0425.

FIELD TRIPS

Continued from page 12

Saturday, December 17th — Antelope Valley CBC. Compiler Fred Heath (310) 826-0083.

Sunday, December 18th — Malibu CBC. Compiler Larry Allen (213) 221-2022.

Sunday, December 18th — Catalina CBC. Co-compilers Misty Gay (310) 510-0954 and Lee Jones (619) 379-1543.

Monday, December 26th — Grass Mountain CBC. Compiler Cal Yorke (805) 270-0222.

Monday, December 26th — San Fernando Valley CBC. Compiler Art Langton (818) 887-0973.

Sunday, January 1 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh.** Meet at 8:00 A.M. See December 4 write-up for details.

Sunday, January 8 — Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson.** Meet at 8:00 A.M. See December 11 write-up for details.

Sunday, January 8 — Quail Lake Vicinity. Our leader and local naturalist **Louis Tucker** will be out to feed his fiery passion for raptors. Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk color morphs, both eagles, Common Goldeneye, Mountain Bluebird and longspurs all possible. Bring lunch and very warm clothes. Leave promptly from Carl's Jr. in Gorman at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, January 21 — Point Mugu. A base field biologist and LAAS leader will lead in this limited access area. Peregrine Falcon and White-winged Scoter possible. Rare birds like Tropical Kingbird, Oldsquaw, Black Scoter seen in recent years. *Sign-up by January 10 required.* Must be 16 years old. No cameras, please. Include one SASE and, for each person in your request, name, citizenship status, phone number, social security number and a \$5 deposit to be refunded at the gate. Take the 101 Fwy W to Las Posas Rd. S, to PCH N onto Wood Rd. W. Head S on the frontage road to the lot at the main (#2) gate. Meet at 8:00 A.M. 🐦

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.

For a complete list of
1995 pelagic trips, see page 7.



EVENING MEETING

Meet at 8:00 P.M. in Plummer Park.
ID Workshop precedes the meeting at 7:30 P.M.
Call the Bird Tape for possible information on ID Workshops.

December 13, 1994 Margaret Huffman
Native Plants for Native Birds

What plants will attract native birds to my yard? How should I arrange them? Learn the answers to these and other questions at this informative program.

ID Workshop: Jonathan Alderfer

January 10, 1995 Beginning Butterflying

Fred Heath, beginning butterflyer, will introduce the new sport of butterfly watching which is becoming increasingly popular among birders. This illustrated talk provides tips, ID help and the general idea of how to get started in this fascinating vocation.

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.

Sunday, December 4 — Topanga State Park. Gerry Haigh will lead participants through this diverse coastal mountain area. 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 Rd. (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.

Saturday, December 10 — Carrizo Plains. Leader Sam Fitton of B.L.M. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in Maricopa. Vehicles \$13 each. Good hawks, eagles and Mountain Plover! Sandhill Cranes hopeful. A jewel in the crown of the Nature Conservancy. If possible, please carpool or avail your vehicle to others. Sign up with Audubon House for exact directions. 8 car limit.

Sunday, December 11 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Join ranger Ray Jillson to see wintering raptors, songbirds and others augment resident and breeding species. Cardinals are resident. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. Take the Peck Dr. exit S off the 60 Fwy in South El Monte (just W of the 605 Fwy). Take the offramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right), and turn left into the Nature Center.

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