

# WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

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## 1994 A Very Good Year

Los Angeles County Birding Highlights

by Mike San Miguel

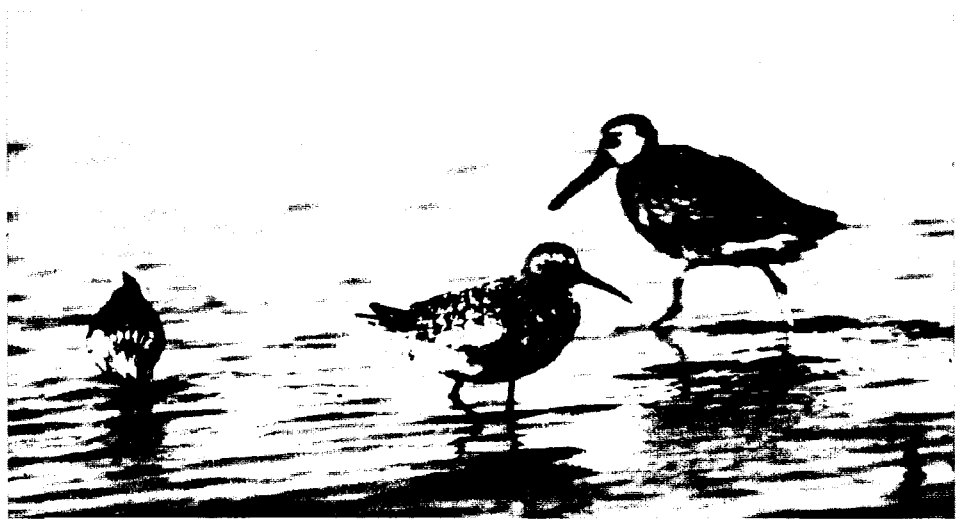


Garrett and Dunn's *Field List of the Birds of Los Angeles County*, released in March, 1994, shows 464 species occurring in the county. In and of itself, that number is amazing when one considers the tremendous growth and massive population living within the county's borders. As Arnold Small points out in his new book, *California Birds*, the L.A. County list is second only to San Diego County (about 475 species) for boasting the largest list in the state or for that matter the country. Indeed, our county is exceeded only by the state lists of Arizona, California and Texas.

It would be easy for the birder to despair at the seemingly overwhelming pressure from the growth, population and destruction of natural habitats we see all around and to think there couldn't possibly be any opportunities for exploration and discovery amidst the concrete, urban sprawl and general mess much of the county has become. Such was hardly the case during the past year for birders willing to put in the extra effort looking for the rarity or other feathered gem, even in places where they seem least likely to occur. The past year was loaded with birding excitement and many other birding events worthy of highlighting.

Space limitations don't allow a discussion of all the good birds showing up in the county last year. The birds mentioned in this article are limited to well-documented first county records, those requiring verification by the California Bird Records Committee and those that have been previously reported in the county fewer than five times.

The ink on the new county checklist was barely dry when in April it already needed to be revised. On 30 April, a group of ornithology students and a few lucky birders on a Cal State University research vessel returning from birding Santa Barbara Island and surrounding waters practically ran over an immature **Masked Booby** sitting on the water about three miles off White Point. Then, on



*Curlew Sandpiper*

21 May, on an LAAS boat trip, Kimball Garrett and others ID'd a **Thick-billed Murre**, southern California's first. Obviously the open waters off the county are still capable of producing some surprises. About two more months lapsed before Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base produced the third new county bird: a completely brick-red, alternate plumaged **Curlew Sandpiper** found by Garrett, Mike San Miguel, Bruce Broadbooks and Kathy Molina.

What better place than Banning Park, with its recent history of great birds, to produce the county's first documented **Yellow-green Vireo** (Mitch Heindel et al.) on 16 October. Just when everyone began to relax, thinking that fall migration had about run its course, the best new bird the county has produced in years showed up. Birders calling into the "Bird Box" after about 2:30 P.M. on 5 November could hardly believe what they were hearing when a **Northern Wheatear** was reported by Scott Smithson at, of all places, Biola University in La Mirada, just barely over the border from Orange County. With only a couple of hours of sunlight remaining in the day, one had to move very quickly on this great rarity, and indeed only a few birders saw the bird that day. As many disappointed birders can attest, the bird was not to be found the following morning.

L.A. birders have speculated for some time that **Inca Dove** might be

one of the "next" birds to be recorded in the county. In mid-November, Cal Yorke in Antelope Valley followed up on a lead from Janet Murphy, a birder in the Antelope Valley's Lake Los Angeles, that Inca Doves had been around her neighborhood since 1991. Birders making the trip to that remote part of the county have found up to 13 of them. Pending further discussion and investigation about their origin (and it seems likely at this juncture that they are legitimate), the species would be the *sixth* added to the county list in the short span of only seven months. All six of these birds were well-documented and stand a good chance of being accepted by the CBRC. This will bring the new county total to about 470 species. Look out San Diego County!

If all those new county birds didn't create enough excitement, there were also plenty of "CBRC birds" scattered throughout the year. As usual, a number of top-quality birds were wintering over into the new year, including a **Glaucous Gull** (Kevin Larson) on the L.A. River at Anaheim Avenue, **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** at Veteran's Park, Sylmar, and Malaga Cove (Doug Martin and Curtis Johnson), two **Broad-billed Hummingbirds** (Jon Ivanov and KL) at South Coast Botanic Gardens, and a **Black-throated Green Warbler** (Tom Wurster) in the Lower Oaks area of Arcadia. On 14 April, a badly misguided **Laysan Albatross**

landed on a lawn in San Marino. On 21 April, a **Zone-tailed Hawk** (MSM) (only the second for the county) showed up in Valyermo and another one was found in Harbor Park on May 9 (MH). On 26 April, Dustin Alcala found a **Tufted Duck** at Hansen Dam. While **Vermilion Flycatcher** doesn't compare in quality to most of the other birds in this article, it is certainly noteworthy that a pair was found nesting in the Leona Valley in May. This was the first documented breeding record of that species in L.A. County.

A **Reddish Egret** was flying past the Palos Verdes Peninsula on May 1 (KL), and on that same date there was a **Painted Redstart** (TW), perhaps the same individual bird that was reported the previous year along the Angeles Crest Highway above Chileo. Three **Least Flycatchers** were found this year in the county: one at Harbor Park on 14 May (MH), another at Pt. Fermin on 11 September (MH), and in the fall at South Coast Botanic Garden on 2 October (KL). A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was found in Santa Clarita on 22 May by Jim Laage. A male **Golden-winged Warbler** in full breeding plumage was found at Banning Park on 27 May (Peter Barnes). There were two **Scarlet Tanagers**: one at Banning Park on 23–27 May (MH), and in the fall at Malaga Cove on 3 November (KL). Yet another LAAS pelagic trip produced a **Brown Booby** in L.A. Harbor at Queen's Gate on 14 August (Jon Alderfer and AS).

The **Blue-winged Warbler** found at Lake Palmdale by Charles Hood on 31 August, the county's second, was only the beginning of what eventually proved to be one of the best falls in recent memory. Jerry Johnson found a **Red-eyed Vireo** at Banning Park on 5 September.

Whittier Narrows, like most birding spots away from the thoroughly birded coastal vagrant traps, is one of the places in the county that is badly underbirded. Nonetheless, it produced a **Prothonotary Warbler** on 11 September (Leo Ohtsuki). A very difficult to observe **Worm-eating Warbler** showed up in Banning Park on 9 October (MH), and at nearby Harbor Park there was a **Canada Warbler** on 13 October (MH).

While the winter of '93–'94 was notable for its lack of northern and montane species, by year's end that had all changed. In October, birders began noting large flocks of **Cedar Waxwing**, **Pine Siskin** and a scattering of other mountain birds. Sightings of **Varied Thrush**, too numerous to mention, were found throughout the county during the fall, and it appeared also to be a good year for **Tundra Swan**, always a rarity for the county. While **Grasshopper Sparrows** are usually a good find for the county, a total of 17 found by Ron Beck last November in Porter Ranch was remarkable. Finally, by year's end the two female **Oldsquaw** at Ballona Creek had grown to a total of five (two male and three female), and there were 11 **Greater Scaup** at the L.A. River near the Queen Mary.

It is obvious the 1994 birding year in L.A. County was outstanding and arguably better than any other California county for sheer quality. In all, about 364 species were seen, including 33 species of



*Glaucous Gull*

warblers. With birding like this, how could devoted local birders be faulted for sticking to their own backyard? Last year, any decision to leave the county, even for a short period, came with trepidation for fear of missing something really good. While 1994 will be difficult to top, the new year will offer many opportunities.

With the Breeding Bird Atlas now in full swing and birders about to cover L.A. County in greater detail than ever before, there will be a significant increase in birder hours during this and the following four years. That effort will assure coverage of parts of the county that have never been birded before and will likely produce some new birding hotspots and perhaps reacquaint us with places that have grown unpopular among birders. It will also produce a good many surprises and perhaps a few new birds for the county's increasingly impressive list. If you haven't decided to become involved in the BBA, it's not too late to contact the regional coordinator covering your favorite local birding spot to look for breeding birds. Keep up the good work, and good birding in 1995. 🐦

*Inca Dove*



*Photos of Reddish Egret, Curlew Sandpiper, Glaucous Gull and Inca Dove by Herb Clarke. These photos are representative of the birds mentioned in the article. Our heartfelt thanks to Herb for his generous photographic contributions over the years to the Western Tanager.*



*Jean Brandt*

# PERSONAL HIGH

by Jean Brandt

**I**t's going to be a great day! Sometimes I just know — and this is one of those times. Last night's warm and gentle Santa Anas blew the haze and smog from the sky, and the crisp clear air tastes good for a change. The scattered clouds are gray but soon take on the astonishing blush of predawn light.

As I park the car and walk toward the lake, wonder of wonders, I hear nothing. The silence is a welcome treat in this city of ours. Soon it will be broken by the calls of waking birds. Nothing is in a hurry this morning. Three Great Egrets sleepily stretch their wings, call out, and languidly glide from the eucalyptus, circling overhead, also looking pink in this early light.

The water is dark but as the sun creeps over the distant mountains, a perfect reflection appears. As the sky brightens, the clouds lose their blush and take on a luminous golden quality. As they play hide-and-seek with the sun, they become black with gilt edges and then back to iridescent gold. A fantastic sunrise. And I am the only one to see it. It's mine.

I walk slowly down the first path to the lake. Four Black-crowned Night Heron kids crouch sleepily on the shore. I know my place and I respect theirs so I don't go any farther. They ignore me and look for the tiny fish that infest the lake. These fish are so plentiful that they cause ripples on the surface when their huge schools circle and dart madly about.

A Green Heron sits on the railing watching the show. He doesn't flush and I get to know him quite well.

We are about 15 feet apart and he doesn't mind me at all once he gives me the once-over and adds me to his "life list."

Nine Snowy Egrets appear and settle down on the mud flat to make breakfast of the silver fish. The resident Great Blue Herons are in the nearby field and pay no attention to the commotion at the lake. Two Greater Yellowlegs fly frantically back and forth, their beep-beep-beep calls loud in the stillness of the hour.

Savannah Sparrows are buzzing and Black Phoebes begin echoing their redundant single note calls. Crows are overhead and Red-winged Blackbirds are gurgling in the rushes. Somewhere a Bewick's Wren scolds and the White-crowns are singing their very special song. There is no "people" noise and I don't make any. I meld into the scene to watch and listen.

I can't hear any "chips" other than the abundant Yellow-rumped Warblers. I won't find the Palm today. It's probably here but I don't see it. Oh well, another time perhaps.

Further along the trail I see a large yellow spider hanging from a very large sunflower. It is eating a butterfly. As usual, I left my camera at home but I've never seen a yellow spider before and am bewitched.

A Black Phoebe is skylarking (I've never seen that before either) and as it calls, a friend flies up

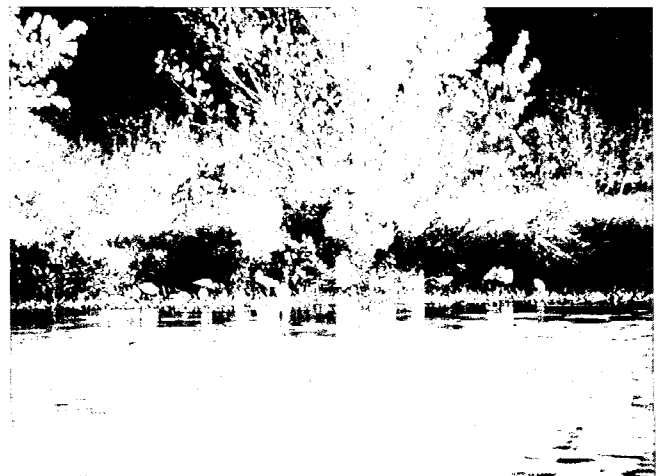
to join in the fun. I like to think that they are enjoying the morning as much as I.

Standing quietly at the side of the lake, watching the ducks and trying to figure out teal eclipse plumages, I am astonished to have a female Northern Harrier land in the rushes at my feet. Honestly, not ten feet away. I hold my breath and hope that she will not notice me. She pokes around for several seconds and takes off, slowly circling just overhead. She gives me a close encounter of the raptor kind and also adds me to her list; she will be with me most of the morning. I've never seen a harrier this close and in such perfect plumage. Rich chestnut brown, black feather edges and pure white upper tail; she is out of the field guide — a perfect model.

Why did she land so close to me? Why did she ignore me? I'll never know but I appreciate her trust. Maybe the herons told her that I am okay?

The calm is broken by the raucous rasps of two Belted Kingfishers. They are after the silver fish too. Plenty for all. Soon the diving ducks will appear and things will really get busy.

There are at least a thousand American Goldfinches feeding on the sunflowers, starting and darting as I come near. I am looking for the European Goldfinch that has been reported and, surprise, I find a goldfinch with a bright red bill. This must be the bird but it isn't in alternate plumage and I'm lucky to have it in my binocs for milliseconds. I don't know what it is but it is fun to see.




An immature Cooper's Hawk comes sailing over, heading for the far end of the lake. It lands and *runs about* on the slimy green shore, looking for God knows what. Frogs? I don't think so. Another first for me; hawks don't *run*.

It's starting to warm up and I have errands to do. I'll maunder back to the car but first I'll check once more. And there it is — the bird of the day! Standing on the far shore is an American Bittern — the first I've seen here in at least 12 years. Once a common breeding bird along the river, it hasn't been reported in a very long time. There it stands, frozen in time as only a

bittern can be. The harrier passes over and the bittern takes off, flying slowly toward me and landing in the nearby reeds. It vanishes. No, it just looks that way. Bitterns have a way of looking like the reeds they frequent and maybe that is why I don't see them anymore. It doesn't move for such a long time and then it really does vanish... I haven't seen it go. Magic.

Now it's time to leave. Joggers, walkers, bikers, lovers, birdwatchers, kids, all start to appear. The crack of the cricket balls intrudes on my solitude. Gashawks are high above and lower down the toy gashawks are buzzing fretfully about.

No life birds, no state birds, no county birds. Just a perfect morning at the Sepulveda Wildlife area. 

*Jean Brandt was the Voice of Audubon for more than ten years and served as President of LAAS from 1978–1981; she currently is the editor of the Western Tanager. Jean has birded in Africa, Australia, Europe and most of the 50 states and Canada. She still enjoys the pleasures of local birding and hopes that this article will encourage people to really look at the birds and habitats nearby. "Every bird does not have to be a 'life' bird."*

## Audubon Begins Strategic Planning Process

By Glenn Olson, Western Regional Vice President

**T**he National Audubon Society has commenced development of a strategic plan that will determine the shape, structure and work of the Society well into the next century. The purpose of this project is to review and challenge Audubon in its entirety — its mission, programs, budget, funding and organization — in the context of the realities facing Audubon and the environmental movement in the United States today... in order to develop recommendations on how to reposition and strengthen NAS to be a more successful and vital organization.

As part of this plan, I have been asked to serve on the 17 person Strategic Planning Task Force, drawn from Audubon staff, chapter leadership and a professional management consulting team that is assisting in the planning process.

### The Opportunity

This appears to be an incredible opportunity for Audubon to chart our course into the 21st Century.

With the announcement by Peter Berle that he will retire this year as National Audubon's president after ten years, it is an appropriate time to examine what we stand for, what we want to do and to develop the plan to get there. In addition, National Audubon has received a very generous anonymous grant of up to \$3 million to strengthen Audubon at the field and grassroots levels. So once we have created our plan, we enjoy the happy benefit of actually possessing the resources to make some or all of it come to pass!


The management consultants, McKinsey and Associates, are a highly qualified and respected firm, doing this job on a *pro bono* basis, a gift to Audubon easily worth more than \$500,000 in market value. Four of the McKinsey staff are headquartered in our New York office, yet much of their initial time has been spent traveling throughout the country interviewing chapter leaders, staff and donors to learn about the current state of the organization.

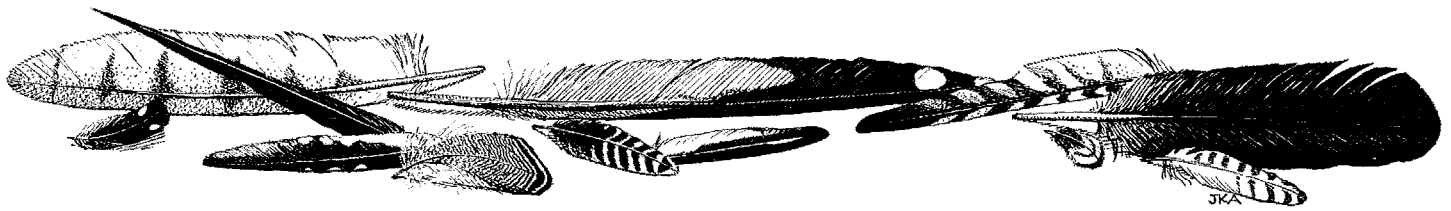
### The Process

The Strategic Planning Task Force is divided into sub-teams to analyze the major issues and to gather input from all constituencies and external sources. The various sub-teams will evaluate Audubon's key strengths and weaknesses, what's going on in the conservation movement, what we are doing and how we can best leverage our strengths and overcome our weaknesses to achieve our mission.

Based on this extensive analysis, the Task Force will then develop several recommendations or "hypotheses" that address major issues raised. These hypotheses will be distributed to all parts of the Audubon organization for comment, testing, evaluation and overall reaction. They will undoubtedly be improved, refined or even rejected through this extensive review.

The refined version of the Task Force recommendations will be presented to the NAS Board of Directors with adoption targeted for the June 15, 1995, NAS Board Meeting.

We truly have a unique opportunity through this process to shape our organization's future, to make it the organization it should be, to empower our chapter, to be the full service ecological conscience of their communities, to take on the major issues confronting us regarding the loss of biodiversity and to make a difference for having done it. 



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

by Kimball L. Garrett

**W**e think of the diminutive Costa's Hummingbird as our quintessential desert hummer — the one we expect in the arid southeastern part of our state. But this is, it turns out, only half true. The Costa's desert occupation of nectar feeding doesn't really pay off much after April, when the Colorado desert lowlands become parched and the bounty of late winter and early spring's flowering diminishes. Studies in Joshua Tree National Monument (Miller and Stebbins 1964) and Deep Canyon near Palm Desert (Weathers 1983) reveal that numbers of Costa's drop significantly during the spring after a late winter/early spring nesting season that takes advantage of the blooming of chuparosa and other perennial and annual plants. In Anza-Borrego (Massey and Evans 1994) some birds may remain throughout the year, a phenomenon perhaps partly explained by the abundance of exotic shrubs in Borrego Springs, but breeding there begins as early as December and numbers are very low in summer. Where do these desert hummers go as spring progresses?

Let's switch to the Los Angeles County perspective. Costa's is not really a bird of our high desert, so we rarely encounter it in the Antelope Valley (where Anna's and summering Black-chinneds are the expected species). We do see a few Costa's on Christmas Counts, primarily in the coastal lowlands where exotic plantings flourish. For the most part, however, these hummers visit our county from April through the summer. They can be



Kimball L. Garrett

*Male Costa's Hummingbird at Anza-Borrego State Park, 10 December 1994*



*Female Costa's on nest in an agave, West San Benito Island, Baja California, 15 February 1978*

## COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD

### *Calypte costae*

surprisingly abundant in the dry chamise chaparral of our interior foothills, as in the canyons above Santa Clarita or the coastal flank of the San Gabriels. Are these the same Costa's Hummingbirds that were so common a month or two earlier on the southern deserts? Without the good fortune of recoveries of uniquely marked individuals, we can only speculate that this is the case. But the numbers are suggestive. Large numbers arriving on the coastal slope at the same time that large numbers depart the deserts is an intriguing correlation.

Let's speculate a bit further. Costa's Hummingbirds breed on the coastal slope of southern California

in late spring and early summer, from late April to July [see Roberson and Tenney (1993) and references therein]. Could these breeding birds also have bred on the deserts earlier in the year? This has been hypothesized by Stiles (1973) and would parallel the situation described for the Phainopepla (Walsberg 1977).

By now you know the moral of the story. Atlasing will enlighten us about the distribution and timing of nesting Costa's Hummingbirds in Los Angeles County and may help fit another piece into the puzzle of the desert/coastal connection. See your regional coordinator now to reserve a block or two — with or without Costa's Hummingbirds! ➤

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## Golden Trout Natural History Workshop

**L**ocated at the 10,000-foot level in the southern Sierra Nevada near Mount Whitney, these six-day workshops provide a special educational adventure to individuals and families. The Golden Trout Camp educational facility is one of only a few such facilities remaining inside federally designated Wilderness Areas. Workshops offer daily hikes within the Cottonwood Lakes basin and surrounding areas; evenings include exposure to the local history and talks by special guests. All meals and shelter are provided. Three 1995 sessions are offered beginning July 30 through August 19; enrollment is limited. To receive a brochure, write to: Golden Trout Natural History Workshop, Inc., Attn: Cindi McKernan, 1230 Friar Lane, Redlands, CA 92373. Tel: (909) 798-3060

## In Passing...

**Marge Wohlgemuth** died last November after a long illness. Marge was a spirited volunteer, House Chairman and Executive Secretary. Those of us who were privileged to work with her will always remember her cheerful attitude and great cooking. She organized the office, paid the bills, dealt with the park personnel and kept us on our toes. Out in the field, she was a good companion and a fine birder. She was an ardent conservationist and devoted countless hours attending hearings and meetings. Her love for wild creatures and wild places was deep and constant.

**Marion Wilson** served as Executive Secretary on several Boards and worked with many Presidents, including Arnold Small, Jim Huffman and Bob Blackstone. She and her husband, Russell, were famous for leading the annual field trips to Morongo Valley.

**Betty Jenner** was Editor of the *Tanager* and an ardent supporter of the chapter. She was an enthusiastic birder and local conservationist.

We wish to express our deep sadness and sympathy to the families and friends of these dedicated women. We will miss them all.

## WESTERN TANAGER

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# A Call To Atlas

**A**s a birder, you already know the satisfaction of finding a bird nest. There's something fascinating about seeing even a common bird carrying a twig or feeding bugs to a fledgling in your backyard. Sighting a breeding bird is not just fascinating — it is useful for conservation. How? It provides data for ecological monitoring projects, such as a breeding bird atlas. A breeding bird atlas provides anyone interested, including biologists, birders and land managers, with basic natural history information for birds in an area. An atlas forms a record of breeding birds that can be a base to begin monitoring trends in the future.

Volunteer atlasers are now beginning field work on the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas. If you missed your monthly chapter meeting where the Atlas was introduced, you may be asking yourself: Is it too late to help? Too late to help map the breeding ranges of the 200 or so bird species nesting in L.A. County? Too late to cover one of the 414 blocks, perhaps even the one around your house?

The answer is: Of course not! Field work for the Atlas will span five years, from 1995 to 1999. Only after that can the information you help compile be put into book (atlas) form. It's not too late for this year or the following four years.

Before you take on a block by yourself (or with friends), you might want to know what a block is. Most of the blocks are approximately ten square miles, just over three miles on a side. Each block is actually  $\frac{1}{6}$  of a standard USGS topographic map (a 7.5 quadrangle). It may sound large, but you don't have to comb every inch of the block; you just have to be sure to sample all of the different habitats it contains. Some of the blocks vary in size at the county border, and they certainly vary in habitat as you go from coast to desert regions (please see region map). For more insight

on how to cover a block, try one of the hands-on (binoculars-on?) Atlas Workshops on covering a block listed in this month's field trip section on page 11.

An atlaser can survey a block in roughly 20 to 30 hours, excluding time spent poring over maps in the planning stage. As you spend these hours in the field over several weekends in spring and summer, your atlasing skills will improve. You may find yourself wanting to sign up for *two* blocks next year!

*Original pen and ink drawing of  
Black-headed Grosbeak  
by John Schmitt*

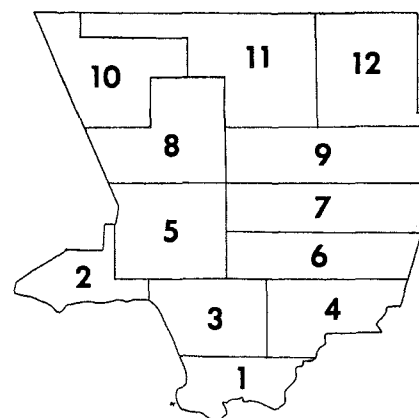


Some atlasers have already reserved blocks with their favorite birding spots. Perhaps you can discover a new birding spot in a less-traveled block. There is certainly no need to stay within your region — you can atlas anywhere in the county. You could even try a real atlasing adventure — have a block assigned to you at random!

At right is a list of names with phone numbers of people volunteering their time as regional coordinators for the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas. To ask about signing up for a block in your region, call your local coordinator. To inquire about other regions in the county, contact the Atlas Project Coordinator. Home telephone numbers are listed unless otherwise indicated, so please be courteous about calling times. 🐦

**Mark Wimer, Project Coordinator**  
213/745-BIRD message machine  
900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles 90007

- 1 SOUTH COAST  
To Be Assigned
- 2 SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS  
Larry Allen  
213/221-2022
- 3 LOS ANGELES BASIN  
Eleanor Osgood  
310/839-5420
- 4 SOUTHEAST COUNTY  
Dan Guthrie  
909/621-4000
- 5 SAN FERNANDO VALLEY  
Dustin Alcala  
818/768-1222
- 6 SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS SOUTH  
Mike San Miguel  
818/355-5058
- 7 HIGH SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS  
Jon Fisher  
818/821-0263
- 8 SANTA CLARITA  
Frank Hovore  
805/250-8311
- 9 SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS NORTH  
Kimball Garrett  
213/744-3368 (work)
- 10 NORTHWEST COUNTY  
Cosmo Bloom  
818/765-3141
- 11 ANTELOPE VALLEY WEST  
Cal Yorke  
805/943-3241 x544 (voice mail)
- 12 ANTELOPE VALLEY EAST  
Fred Heath, Project Director  
310/826-0083





# LOS ANGELES COUNTY BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

## CASUAL OBSERVATION FORM

(please fill out a separate form for each species observed)

SPECIES \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_  
(day month year)

EXACT LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

BREEDING STATUS: circle one breeding code and/or describe your observations under comments.

POSSIBLE	E	S									
PROBABLE	M	A	P	T	C	N	B				
CONFIRMED	PE	NB	DD	UN	ON	FL	FS	FY	NE	NY	

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

OBSERVER'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (      ) -

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### BREEDING CODES

#### OBSERVED

✓ This category and code only applies if you are covering a whole block

#### POSSIBLE

E Individual(s) encountered in suitable breeding habitat within safe-date period

S Singing male encountered in suitable breeding habitat within safe date period

#### PROBABLE

M Multiple singing or territorial males reported within one block in one day

A Agitated behavior or anxiety calls from adult

P Pair observed in suitable breeding habitat in safe-date period

T Territorial behavior or singing male present at least two dates seven or more days apart

C Courtship or copulation observed

N Visiting probable nest site (hole nesters)

B Nest building by wrens or excavation by woodpeckers

#### CONFIRMED

PE Physiological evidence

NB Nest building (except wrens and woodpeckers)

DD Distraction display

UN Used nest

ON Occupied nest (nests in holes, high nests; i.e. where contents are uncertain)

FL Recently fledged or downy dependent young

FS Adult carrying fecal sac

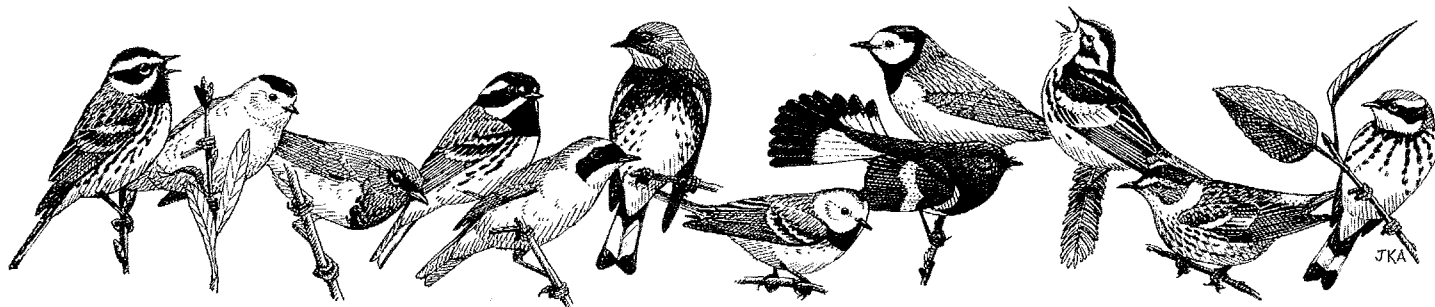
FY Adult carrying food for young

NE Nest with eggs or eggshells on ground

NY Nest with young seen or heard

Please mail to:

LOS ANGELES COUNTY BREEDING BIRD ATLAS  
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 Exposition Blvd.,  
Los Angeles, CA 90007 (213) 745-BIRD



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

**M**arch finds spring migration under way in earnest; Rufous Hummingbirds, Ash-throated and Pacific-slope Flycatchers and Northern Orioles all arrive in numbers at this time of year. While the classic *Birds of Southern California, Status and Distribution* by Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn is no longer in print, the bar graphs from that book have been reprinted in Hank Childs' *Where Birders Go In Southern California* (available at the LAAS Bookstore). This should give you some idea of when to expect migrants. If you see any birds that seem to arrive earlier than usual, please let me know. We are interested in early records.

The heavy rains of this winter should encourage a good bloom of wildflowers in favored areas on the coastal slope — and possibly in the desert if the timing is right. The Wildflower Hotline, sponsored by the Theodore Payne Foundation at (818) 768-3533, can keep you apprised of the best areas.

This past winter had several very interesting records, including sightings of two of our area's rarer vagrant warblers. A spate of **Harris' Hawks** found in December and early January in San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial Counties represent what may be the first natural occurrence of this species in California since 1964. A population explosion in Baja California is believed responsible. Whether this striking raptor will be able to establish breeding populations in California again remains to be seen.

The first **Roseate Spoonbill** since 1983 was found near Seeley, Imperial County, on 27 December (Roger Higson). **Tundra Swans** reported from the L.A. Basin include five from Sepulveda Basin on 21 November (Jack Nash, Bob Pann et al.) and two from Playa del Rey on 27 November (Richard Barth). **Ross' Geese**, rare in winter away from the Central Valley and the Salton Sea, were reported from Ventura Marina on 25 November (Herb Clarke and Larry Sansone), from Apollo Lake, Lancaster, on 10 December (Cal Yorke) and from Holiday Lake on 14 January (Jean Brandt and Phil Sayre). A **Wood Duck** was at Playa del Rey on 1 December (Gregor McIver and Derek Shanman). A **Eurasian Wigeon** was at El Cariso Park, Los Angeles, on 9 December (Rich Pagen), and a **Harlequin Duck** was at Sunset Beach on 3 January (Mike San Miguel). The flock of **Oldsquaws** at Marina Del Rey has grown to an unprecedented (in our area) five birds. **Hooded Merganser** reports include one at Sepulveda Basin on 22 November (RP), one at Downey Wilderness Park on 27 November (HC & LSa) and 12 at the Hollywood Reservoir on 2 January (Jon Fisher, Kathy Mish and JB).

An immature **Bald Eagle** was at the Oxnard Sewer Ponds on 10 December (Jerry Freidman). A "Harlan's" **Red-tailed Hawk** was in the Puente Hills near Whittier on 20 November (John Schmitt). Three **Ferruginous Hawks** were reported from the coastal slope this winter; one along Las Virgenes Road near Agoura on 2 December

(Robert Weissler) and two different birds from the Puente Hills, one on 4 December and one on 11 December (both JS).

A flock of 50 **Mountain Plovers** remained in the Antelope Valley since at least 13 December (many obs.). A wintering **Solitary Sandpiper** returned for the fourth year to Madrona Marsh, Torrance, on 27 December, and a **Red Phalarope**, one of a scattering of reports along the California coast this winter, was at the same location on 5 January (both David Moody).

A very rare **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was discovered at Doheny Beach State Park on 27 December (Loren Hays and Jim Pike) and was still present 22 January. A **Sabine's Gull**, most unusual here in winter, was reported at the Oxnard Sewer Pond on 15 December (JFr).

Single **White-winged Doves** were visiting feeders in the Basin at Redondo Beach on 26 November (Martin Byhower) and at Mar Vista on 17 December (Jay Fuhrman). A **Short-eared Owl** was at the Santa Clara River mouth in Ventura County on 21 November. An adult female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was seen on the Malibu Christmas Count on 17 December (Hank & Priscilla Brodtkin), and an immature was at La Mirada Park on 13 January (Larry Schmahl).

A very late (wintering?) **Western Wood-Pewee** was at Huntington Beach Central Park on 28 November (Doug Willick), a **Least Flycatcher** was at Mason Regional Park, Orange County, on 25 Decem-

ber (DW), a **Hammond's** and a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** were at the South Coast Botanic Gardens on 3 December (Kevin Larson), and several **Gray Flycatchers**, the *Empidonax* species to be expected in winter, were also reported. A **Vermilion Flycatcher** again returned to the El Dorado Nature Center on 10 December (John Fitch), and a **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** was at Lake Park, Huntington Beach, on 29 November (JP).

Those two most unusual winter warbler reports were a male **Pine Warbler** at La Mirada Park on

13 January (LSc) and a male **Mourning Warbler** in Newport Beach on 1 January (Brian Daniels) — both still present 22 January.

A male **Black-headed Grosbeak**, rarer in winter here than the Rose-breasted, was coming to a feeder in Agoura on 25 December (RW). **White-throated Sparrows** were seen at Veteran's Park in Sylmar on 9 December (RP) and at a Redondo Beach feeder on 26 November (MB). A "Gray-headed" **Oregon Junco** was in the Puente Hills on 11 December (JS), and a **Cassin's Finch** was at O'Melveny

Park in Granada Hills on 13 December (Doug Martin).

Good Birding! 



**R**ecords 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*

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 finish about 1:00 P.M.

**Saturday, March 25 — L.A. Zoo Tour.** LAAS member and zoo docent **Guy Commeau** will show off the diversity of our city's zoo. Meet at 10:00 A.M. at the main gate. Picnic or buy lunch and continue in the afternoon if you like. Binoculars recommended. Zoo fees: adults \$7, children \$3; less if a large group.

**Saturday and Sunday, April 1 and 2 — Owens Valley Grouse Trip.** **Mary Carmona** will orchestrate this road-intensive weekend. Rosy Finches, Sage Grouse, Blue Grouse, Sage Thrashers, Pinyon Jays, Osprey and Golden Eagle are all expected. Limited to 20 participants. Send SASE with \$10 check to LAAS for 7:30 A.M. Saturday meeting location in Big Pine and lodging list.

**Saturday, April 8 — Franklin Canyon.** Leader **Steven Saffier**. Franklin Canyon is located between Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 100 species of birds have been documented in the chaparral, ripar-

ian and woodland habitats of the canyon. From the 101 Fwy, take Coldwater Canyon S into the hills. Immediately after Mulholland Dr. merges from the W with Coldwater Canyon, make a 90° right turn onto Franklin Canyon and continue on to the Nature Center. Meet at

### 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.



8:00 A.M. in the parking lot past a gated drive on the left.

**Sunday, April 9 — Antelope Valley Breeding Bird Atlas.** Leader **Fred Heath**. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at Lamont-Odett Overlook to review BBA techniques and look at birds and flowers. Fun and educational; no commitment required. See listing in April *Tanager* for more info.

 **Friday, 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 Conception 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, April 30 — Starr Ranch Audubon Sanctuary.** Participation limited. See listing in April *Tanager* for more info.

 **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. 

# EVENING MEETING

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

**March 14, 1995      Bob Barnes**  
**Birds in the Balance**

Bob Barnes, a dynamic and fun speaker, is the Birds in the Balance coordinator for the National Audubon Society. His division runs several programs including habitat preservation, migratory landbird monitoring and breeding bird atlases. He will talk about the various programs of the NAS and how you can be involved.

**April 11, 1995      Gene Cardiff**  
**Birds of the Bolivian Andes**

Encounter Cock-of-the-Rock and Paradise Tanager as Gene travels upslope on a six-week expedition into the Andean highlands of Bolivia.



Lee Jones

*Hooded Oriole*

## F I E L D T R I P S

**B**efore 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**

**Sunday, March 5 — 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 and Sunday, March 11 and 12 — Anza Borrego** with **Fred Heath**. The spring explosion of flora and fauna, including butterflies, should be under way in the Colorado Desert. Suggested accommodations: Tamarisk Grove Camp-

ground (reserve through Mistix at 800/444-7275) or Stanlund Motel in Borrego Springs (619/767-5501). Anticipate a busy weekend, and reserve motels or campsites NOW. If no camping is available, call Fred through LAAS or take your chances at the two nearby overflow sites. Limited to 20 participants. Send SASE with \$5 fee to LAAS for 8:00 A.M. meeting place. Pleasant days, cool to cold nights.

**Sunday, March 12 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park** with Ranger **Ray Jillson**. 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 offramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right), and turn left into the Nature Center.

**Monday, March 20 — Van Norman Reservoir.** Leader **Dustin Alcalá**. 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.

Los Angeles Audubon Society    **DATED MATERIAL**  
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West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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