

WESTERN TANAGER



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The other day (September 19, 1995, as a matter of record), a student who had been taking science courses here at Antelope Valley College for several years appeared at my office door holding up a small plastic bag containing a lifeless, dark lump. "I think it's a Wrentit or something," Steven said cautiously, rubbing his graying, neatly trimmed beard. "It smells pretty bad."

Long before I had met him in 1989, Steven had developed a fondness for natural history. Thereafter, he occasionally caught me between classes to chat about an observation he had made on the local fauna. He seemed to know the larger birds and mammals, at least the common species identifiable without the aid of a binocular. Steven had an especially keen eye for dead animals, and had brought in a few road-killed specimens, some of which I had hastily tossed into our museum freezer where they now rest, contorted in hideous ways.

I wasn't expecting much of a surprise as I reached into the bag and gently removed the softly feathered carcass. Steven had found the bird next to the glass doors leading to the campus bookstore. I had hardly ever looked for birds there, since it is close to a busy parking lot with a few round hedges and a public telephone. My regular birding route included mostly the well-vegetated, less-frequented areas of the cam-

pus. Steven's bird was probably a House Wren or perhaps a Bewick's, I guessed, holding my breath. A Wrentit was out of the question because it's a non-migratory, chaparral bird. Anyway, nothing significant would likely turn up in a corner of the campus rated ornithologically uninteresting...

"Hey Steven, this is a Long-billed Marsh Wren!"

"Yeah. I knew it was something like that," he replied confidently.

"Congratulations, Steven! You have just found bird species number 99 for our campus list!"

"Wow, really?"

Prior to my arrival in August,

1984, no one had bothered to document the birds of the Antelope Valley College campus. I quickly appointed myself principal investigator. Initial surveys were encouraging. I found 40 species of bird the first year, including nesting Western Kingbirds, American Robins and Lawrence's Goldfinches. In those days, there were about 6,800 students and about two acres of relatively quiet, closed-canopy woodland in the center of the 120-acre campus.

Since then, Antelope Valley College has enrolled as many as 10,475 students and added several new buildings, including a two-story li-

The List

BY CAL YORKE

brary now dominating the center of the campus. The remaining trees — fruitless mulberry, ash, sycamore, Mediterranean pine and a few others — are isolated or exist in small clumps. However, between the library and the science faculty offices there is about an acre of mature trees dominated by mulberry, ash and sycamore. Exotic shrubs bordering buildings have survived but have been severely pruned, and very little leaf-litter accumulates beneath them. Tractor mowers and leaf blowers roar on weekdays, accompanying students to their classes.

By 1990, the bird list appeared to have levelled off at 85 species. Kingbirds, robins and goldfinches no longer nested on campus. My colleagues and students, who had been making additions to the bird list for several years, justifiably lost some interest. Then slowly, as construction and new landscaping neared completion, birds began to return to the college campus. Winter Wren, Western Bluebird and Solitary Vireo were added, among others. And, from a ditch carrying runoff water from Rawley-Duntley Park across the street from the college, came an upstart desert riparian strip along the west border of the campus. It was there that I had pushed the bird list to 98 species last November, with Song Sparrow and Lesser Goldfinch.

Shortly after Steven had delivered the marsh wren specimen, I was systematically searching every bush and tree on campus for the century bird. It was as if the list had suddenly taken on a life of its own... or taken over my life, I wasn't sure. One hundred seemed like a noble number, indeed remarkable for 120 acres of largely non-native, riparian vegetation, replacing what was originally Joshua tree — California juniper shrubland. If nothing else, a 100 bird species list would be a testimonial to the adaptability, the survivability of wildlife in an environment dominated by man; an environment marginally tolerable to native species in general and birds in particular. Even when the list had been half that

number, students would commonly remark, "I had no idea there were that many birds around here!" And when told that about 300 bird species had been found in the Antelope Valley, long-time residents shook their heads with disbelief.

I glanced at my watch. It was already 10:30 A.M., and my next class was at eleven o'clock. I had seen four ravens, eight starlings, three Rock Doves, a pair of Yellow Warblers and a Warbling Vireo. It wasn't much to report to my biology students, especially since they were expecting a lecture on protozoans. Birding the campus, if not academically defensible, was at least a pleasant diversion from the classroom.

Students smiled and waved to me as I glassed the juniper shrubs next to a towering Western sycamore leaning over the science building. But a few students weren't so happy to see me scanning with a binocular, particularly the attractive young women wearing tights practicing modern dance behind the gymnasium. They were, coincidentally, in the line of sight with a large mulberry tree and a couple of fast-moving Yellow Warblers. Across the lawn, several male students from the auto body repair class were on a cigarette break and had been enjoying the view of the dancers when I approached. "Could we

borrow those binoculars?" one of them asked, half seriously. "Why don't you just sign up for the dance class?" I suggested playfully. There was a moment of reflective silence. "That would be too obvious," one of them replied, resulting in a chorus of laughter. It was a good comeback. Even a *Paramecium* may panic if stared at too long under a microscope.

By Saturday of the week of the dead marsh wren, I had logged enough hours birding the campus to be convinced that bird number 100 probably wasn't there. Nevertheless, it was a good day to visit Galileo Park, the famous vagrant trap in Kern County. Several rarities had been found there recently, including two warblers I had not seen before in California — Golden-winged and Black-throated Blue. Both were easily found along with scores of birders, some equipped with telephoto lenses and two-way radios. I have not seen a bird checklist for Galileo Park; it would doubtless be very impressive.

But a bird list for a particular location is simply a record of fact (or wishful thinking) that, aside from the emotional embellishments attached to it, should be recognized as largely historical and probably out of date as soon as compiled. Bird populations are dynamic, reflecting climatic change and fluctuating re-

Female Lazuli Bunting



sources. Thus, bird species lists, particularly for desert oases, tend to have low year-to-year reliability and do little to advance our understanding of bird biology.

Of course it would be wrong to conclude bird lists have no value. A geographic bird list, or a personal life list, even as one's primary focus, can stimulate interest in habitat preservation which is the key to wildlife preservation and ultimately the continued existence of mankind. And, truthfully, there are far more destructive forms of outdoor recreation than driving day and night to check off a bird species on a list. Hard-core listers and serious ornithologists necessarily converge on issues of environmental protection.

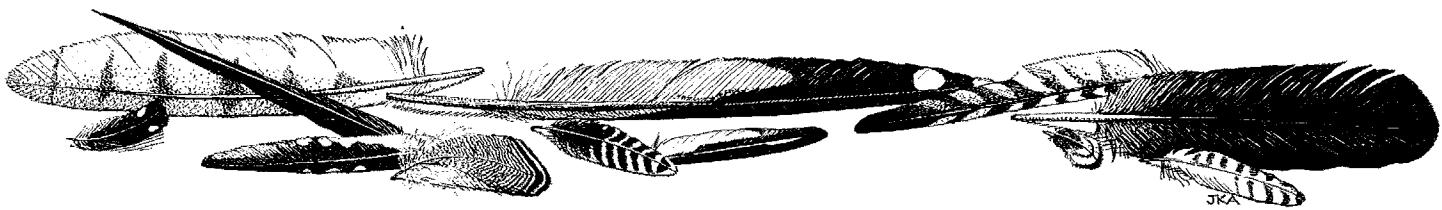
It's Sunday evening, September 24, 1995. I'm sitting in my office; the campus is rarely so quiet. Fall migration in the desert this year has been phenomenal. Yesterday, at the skeet range of Galileo Park, I watched a Golden-winged Warbler dance to the popular sound of a twelve-gauge shotgun. Welcome to the Old West, tenderfoot! And if that wasn't enough of a blast, bird species number 100 finally appeared at Antelope Valley College!

Early that Sunday morning I found a female Lazuli Bunting feeding on grass seeds (*Poa* sp.) in the desert riparian strip on the west border of the campus. The bird seemed a little nervous, as if it judged I had taken more time than necessary for identification. It suddenly stopped eating and, with seed husks falling from its mouth, flew around me in a wide arc into a dense clump of mulefat upstream. I followed. It then flew the reverse course, landing in plain view. The tail feathers were faintly blue but only in good light. The throat and breast were a warm buff, the wing bars a shade lighter. I kept watching, thinking the bird might do something unusual. But it was only a Lazuli Bunting, doing what Lazuli Buntings do. And I was a birder, doing what birders do — merging with the wildness of the moment and contemplating the latest addition to a remarkable list. ↩

A Plurality of Birds —OR— When is a Flock Not a Flock?

Compiled by John Farrand

- A badelyng of ducks.
- A bazaar of murres or guillemots.
- A bevy of quail.
- A bouquet of pheasants.
- A brood of hens.
- A building of rooks.
- A cast of hawks.
- A chatter of birds.
- A charm of finches.
- A clutch of eggs.
- A company of wigeons.
- A congregation of plovers.
- A covert of coots.
- A covey of partridges.
- A deceit of lapwings.
- A descent of woodpeckers.
- A desert of lapwings.
- A dissimulation of birds.
- A drooping of shelducks.
- An exaltation of larks.
- A fall of woodcock.
- A flight of swallows or doves.
- A gaggle of geese (on water).
- A host of sparrows.
- A murder of crows.
- A murmuration of starling.
- A mustering of storks or peacocks.
- A nide or nye of pheasants.
- An ostentation of peacocks.
- A paddling of ducks (on water).
- A parliament of owls.
- A peep of chickens.
- A pitying of turtledoves.
- A plump of ducks.
- A raft of ducks (on water).
- A rafter of turkeys.
- A siege of herons.
- A skein of geese (in the air).
- A sord or sute of mallards.
- A spring of teal.
- A stand or wing of plovers.
- A tiding of magpies.
- A walk of snipe.
- A watch of nightingales.
- A whiteness of swans.
- An unkindness of ravens.

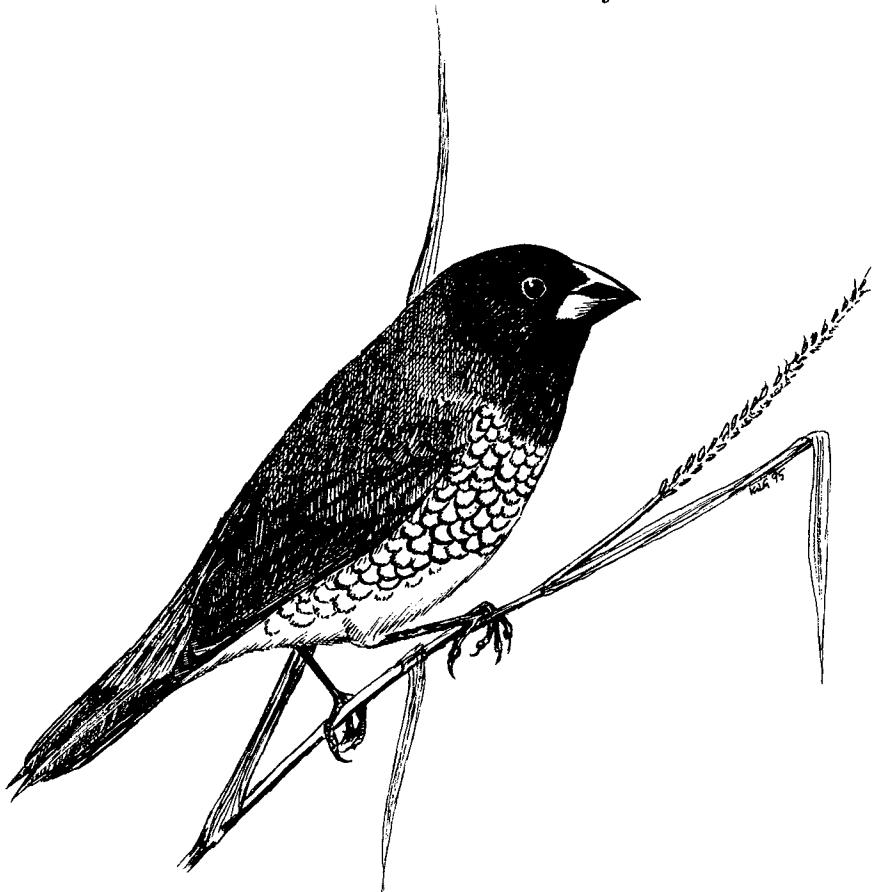


A CLOSER LOOK

by Kimball L. Garrett

A closer look at what, I hear you ask?! No, you won't find the subject of this month's article in any of your standard North American field guides. You WILL find it, however, in that most useful of references for tinsel town birding, *Simon and Schuster's Guide to Pet Birds* by Matthew M. Vriends (1984). Like so many birds that are popular with aviculturists, however, this bird goes under a variety of names, and the *Pet Birds* guide calls it the "Spice Bird" or "Spice Finch." Other popular names include "Spotted Munia," "Ricebird" and "Scaly-breasted Mannikin" (probably the most descriptive name). The American Ornithologists' Union, which treats this species by virtue of its establishment on the Hawaiian Islands, employs "Nutmeg Mannikin," and this is therefore the name we should embrace in order to counter the baffling array of names foisted upon us by the cage bird crowd. Of course, we can always fall back on the more stable scientific name, *Lonchura punctulata*.

Now that we've got the subject straight, what does it have to do with birding in southern California? Simply this: there are lots of free-flying Nutmeg Mannikins in our midst, their numbers appear to be growing, and breeding has been documented in several places in the past couple of years. These birds are perhaps best known from Huntington Beach Central Park in Orange County where they may number in the dozens. They are also established locally along weedy



Adult Nutmeg Mannikin
Original Pen and Ink by Kimball L. Garrett

Nutmeg Mannikin

Lonchura punctulata

riverbottoms and pond margins in Los Angeles County. In the San Gabriel River system they are found in the Whittier Narrows Dam basin (where breeding was documented in 1994), in the San Gabriel River-bottom around Pico Rivera (breeding in 1995), and in El Dorado Na-

ture Center in Long Beach. In the Los Angeles River drainage up to 15 were present in the Devil's Gate Dam basin in Pasadena in fall 1995, and small numbers have also been noted in the Los Angeles River-bottom near Elysian Park. Undoubtedly they are far more wide-

spread than suggested above, but data on these and other exotics prove difficult to come by. Nutmeg Mannikins in southern California appear to be partial to wet grassy habitats; they can be seen stripping seeds off stems of exotic grasses such as Dallis grass. In some parts of their range they are considered pests in rice fields. Flood control basins and soft-bottom river channels form ideal habitat in late summer and fall when annual growth is lush. It is unclear just what these finches (and *Euplectes* bishops) do from midwinter through spring when such habitats are essentially unavailable due to winter flooding and scouring.

The *Lonchura* finches are native to the Afrotropics, the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia (Goodwin 1982). Most African species are called "mannikins," whereas Indian/Asian species are often called "munias" as well as mannikins; one group of species found both in Africa and India is called "silverbills." Mannikins and other finches of the family *Estrildidae* have been shuffled over much of the planet through deliberate and accidental liberations. Long (1981) lists over 145 documented introductions of estrildid finches around the world, over half of them "successful." Of at least nine introductions of Nutmeg Mannikins, several have taken hold. The species is a common exotic on Singapore, Mauritius and the main Hawaiian Islands; it has become abundant over much of eastern Australia as well, indicating its potential for success in continental situations. The history of the Nutmeg Mannikin in southern California is poorly known; Hardy (1973) does not mention this species in his review of feral exotic birds in the region. It is a popular cage bird, and the potential for accidental liberation is therefore high.

The Nutmeg Mannikin is a rather small (4 1/2") finch with a heavy bill and somewhat pointed tail. Adults are rich reddish brown on the head and upperparts, with a hint of yellowish green on the uppertail coverts. The white under-

parts are conspicuously marked with blackish feather fringes on the breast, sides and flanks, imparting a distinctive scaly appearance. The back and wing coverts show fine whitish shaft streaks. The tail is moderately short; the pointed central tail feathers project slightly beyond the rest of the tail. Juveniles are uniformly warm tan in color, lacking the rich reddish tones and scaly markings of the adults. The stout bill is slate-gray. Agitated birds often quickly "switch" their tails (bunting-fashion) and rapidly flick their wings. The high-pitched song is so quiet as to be nearly inaudible, but the typical call note is loud and distinctive: "bee" or "ki-bee" with a "beeping" quality.

I urge birders to keep tabs on sightings of Nutmeg Mannikins and other exotic species. Breeding evidence for all such exotics is sought for the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas, and I'm particularly interested in the distribution and habitat use of mannikins and bishops during our winter and spring. For an added challenge, see if you can pick out any other exotic finches with these mannikins. I've seen White-headed Mannikin (*Lonchura maja*), Chestnut Mannikin (*L. malacca*), Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrild*), Orange-cheeked Waxbill (*E. melpoda*), and Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) in the wild in the Los Angeles area. ■

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Birding Beidaihe, China

by Mary Thompson

When I realized that I was really going to be able to attend the NGO Forum for Women and the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, China, this September, I decided to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bird in mainland China and spend a week in Beidaihe, the migration hub written up by Martin Williams recently in *Birding*. I thought that my observations might be of interest for those who are considering birding the area.

Somehow, after reading Williams' article, I had the impression the Beidaihe would not be too difficult to do on my own. I would have found it next to impossible without the help of Professor Hsu Weishu, the Chinese ornithologist mentioned in the article, and I recommend that anyone interested in birding Beidaihe contact him. Professor Hsu is a charming and helpful retired ornithologist who speaks excellent English. His special area of study is migration in China.

We met soon after I arrived in Beijing and he made my train and hotel reservations and accompanied me for the first few days of my visit. He negotiated a good price for my room at the Jin Shan Hotel in Beidaihe (posted rates are now \$35-\$55 US for a double), rented an inexpensive bicycle for me to use (\$6 US/day), took me to the major birding areas near town, and arranged for a one-day excursion to the Great Wall near Shanhaiguan. (This ended up a tourist trip rather than a birding expedition but was interesting never-

theless.) I bought from him a copy of the *Atlas of the Birds of China*, which he co-authored (\$20, common and scientific names in English — descriptions in Chinese, plates and maps helpful. English edition scheduled in 1996) and he gave me a helpful pamphlet on birding the area. Before he left me, he wrote in Chinese characters several useful phrases and the names of a number of food items that I liked. This was a big help in restaurants.

I found the town of Beidaihe much larger than I had anticipated. It took more time than expected to get around by bike, perhaps because I have not been on one for almost 20 years. Taxis were cheap — \$2.50 to

\$3.00 to get from the hotel to the main sites near town, and several days I taxied to the Sandflats and reservoir, birded until mid-afternoon and walked back to the hotel. If you plan to use a bike, I'd recommend that you bring a bell and mirror. Rental bikes do not come so equipped. Almost no one outside the hotel spoke English although the combination of Professor Hsu's list and the *Mandarin Phrase* book published by Lonely Planet allowed me to eat. With the help of a detailed map I bought at the train station, I was able to negotiate taxis. Food was very inexpensive. The hotel breakfast buffet was \$2.50 and most dinners were \$1-\$3 US. One hotel employee, Ms. Xu, is a member of the Beidaihe Birdwatching Association, speaks fair English, and is knowledgeable about the sites. She arranged a half-day excursion to the

Yanghe estuary which provided the best shorebird variety of the trip. The cost was only \$12.50 US.

Unfortunately, due to conference timing and personal commitments, I was not in Beidaihe at an optimum time. Shorebird migration had peaked earlier, it was a little early for passerine migration and, possibly due to warmer than normal weather and lack of cold fronts moving through, raptor migration was late. These factors resulted in my list being less than memorable, although I did pick up a few nice lifers. On balance, I found Beidaihe interesting and my stay enjoyable although challenging. I would consider returning, but only with companions or as part of a tour.

You can reach Professor Hsu Weishu by writing him at 1-1-302, Beijing Commission for Science & Technology Apartment, Balizhuang, Haidian District, Beijing 100037, China. ▶





(National Wildlife Refuge)

Among the most awe-inspiring sights in nature is the annual fall migration of tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese to their wintering grounds on the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near Socorro, New Mexico. Wildlife enthusiasts of all ages will enjoy the spectacle of these migrating flocks.

The eighth annual Festival of the Cranes is scheduled to begin Thursday, November 16. By the last day, November 19, an estimated 12,000 people from around the world will have traveled to Socorro, swelling the population to twice its usual size. In total there are more than one hundred scheduled activities listed in the 1995 Catalog of Events. Included are demonstrations, workshops, guided tours, exhibits and an Artisan's Fair. The 1995 Festival features keynote speakers Karen Hollingsworth, Arthur Morris and Victor Emanuel.

Many events will be of interest to bird enthusiasts — from free workshops and demonstrations to a "Breakfast with the Birds" tour. Led by enthusiastic guides and featuring a gourmet breakfast basket, these tours will concentrate on looking for the rare and unusual bird species present on the refuge.

To amateur and professional photographers, a key benefit enjoyed during the Festival is having access to areas in the 57,000-acre refuge that are usually closed to the public. Of special interest to photographers are photography workshops, a photography contest and the keynote speakers who are nationally known photographers.

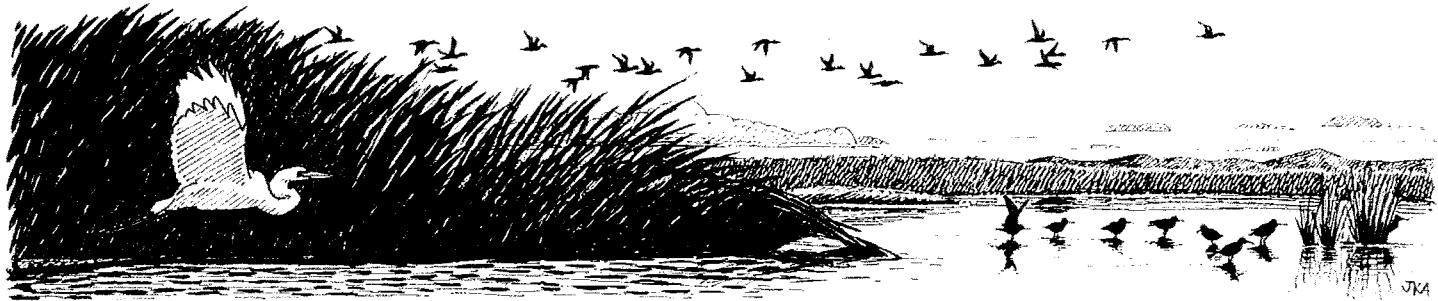
In addition to wildlife- and conservation-related activities, the 1995 Festival of the Cranes will spotlight the Socorro area's rich environmental diversity, geology and history with several guided tours. Destinations will include the Kelly Ghost Town and Waldo Mine, the Chihuahuan Desert terrain of the Quebradas Backcountry Byway, bird-rich Water Canyon, the historical Fort Craig and Battle of Val Verde areas, and Native American petroglyph sites.

Theme T-shirts and sweatshirts for this year's Festival, designed by Socorro artist Vivian Olsen, will feature Sandhill and Whooping cranes in flight.

Advanced registration for the Festival is highly recommended, as most events have limited capacity. Festival information and tickets are available from:

Festival of the Cranes
P.O. Box 743-NR
Socorro, NM 87801
(505) 835-0424





CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

If you think the rumblings in Congress about the infamous intrusions of environmental laws on sacred property rights are scary, you ain't heard nothin' yet. The dream of the anti-environmental Mafia to live free of the moderate restraints of the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act and similar laws is crowned by their passion for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The 19-million acre Refuge is one of the most remarkable natural areas in the world. We tend to throw the word "pristine" around rather casually. My dictionary says, "primitive, hence uncorrupted by civilization." That's the Refuge.

Perhaps it is as yet uncorrupted because it is on the northeastern tip of Alaska above the Arctic Circle at the edge of the Beaufort Sea where the pack ice remains even in the 24-hour summer. Its 30,000 square miles contain the rugged Brooks Range, wild north-flowing rivers, great swatches of permafrost and muskeg bog and, in season, billions of mosquitoes. Not your comfortable tourist attraction. Its animal life is legendary:

polar bears, grizzly and black bears, moose, Dall sheep, caribou, musk ox, wolves, wolverines and many members of the weasel family. Hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese nest in the Refuge, feeding their young on the insect life before coming south. An extraordinary number of species of shorebirds nest here as well as fal-

cons, jaegers, eagles and Snowy Owls. A wildlife paradise.

Sixty miles west of the Refuge is Prudhoe Bay where the Trans-Alaska pipeline begins its 850-mile journey to the port of Valdez and to the awaiting oil tankers. Once this vast tundra plain was a mirror image of the Coastal Plain of the Refuge where Snow Geese, Tundra Swans and Arctic Terns foraged and raised their young and took their chances with the four-footed predators. Now the Prudhoe living space is choked with crisscrossed roads and pipes and people who serve the drilling pads, production facilities and airfields.

migrate north across rivers and over hills to the Coastal Plain where they drop their calves in June. About 150,000 of them make the pilgrimage, fattening up on tundra grasses and lichens before returning to the mountains in late summer for another winter of cold and darkness. For thousands of years, the Gwich'in Athapaskan and other native people lived in intimate contact with the caribou much as the Plains Indians' relationship with the buffalo. Further alteration of the health and migration habits of the caribou could threaten the survival of these tribes.

When the Alaska Lands Act of 1980 established the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Stuart Udall, Interior Secretary, hailed the protection of what he called the nation's "crown jewels."

Most of the country cheered. What went unnoticed was the designation of only 8 million of the 19 million acres as wilderness, a category that prohibits roads and development. To get the Act passed, conservationists had to agree that the rich Coastal Plain would not be included as wilderness.

The Coastal Plain had long been coveted by the oil companies and politicians, especially after Prudhoe oil swished down the pipeline. There is something in the Alaska mystique that seems to encourage an exaggerated sense of states' rights: We are the pioneers on the frontier, this lands belongs to us and keep your bureaucratic



The wildlife habitat and the creatures it nourished are sadly reduced. With fewer predators — the wolves and the bears — to cull the sick and weak, the caribou are in bad shape. These barren ground caribou, sometimes called reindeer, winter in the valleys of the Brooks Range and Canadian mountains and

hands off it. Governors, congressmen and senators embody this attitude of independence and possessiveness. For years they have been unflinchingly against reasonable environmental laws, particularly any and all wilderness designation in their state. With the new Republican majority, the Alaskan foxes are indeed in charge of the henhouse. In the Senate, Ted Stevens is chairman of the powerful Rules Committee which controls legislation priorities. Frank Murkowski heads the Energy and Natural Resources Committee — right up his alley. In the House, Alaska's lone congressman is Don Young, the new chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, the key public land use committee in the House. We can easily imagine them rubbing their hands in anticipation of hearings on the Refuge.

The arguments for drilling are familiar: Prudhoe Bay yield is declining, dependence on foreign oil threatens national security, the Coastal Plain is only a small part of the Refuge and not that important. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assessment in 1987 said the Coastal Plain is "the most biologically productive part of the Arctic Refuge and is the center of wildlife activity..." It goes on to describe the expected impact of oil spills, air pollution, pipeline leaks and overall construction on the land, water and wildlife. Conservationists claim that mandating fleet average of 30 miles to the gallon for new cars would save 11 billion barrels of oil in 30 years. And how much oil is in the Refuge anyhow? The latest optimistic estimate is a six-month supply.

Recent polls show that preservation of the environment is still a high priority for the general public. Can we in good conscience stand passively by while our last great natural treasure is trashed? Must we weep for the Native Americans and the caribou they depend upon: for a *pristine* ecosystem and the unique wildlife it embraces? We have already sinned too much against the earth. We must not let this happen. —

The Week That Was

by Glenn Cunningham

One day, soon after my retirement, I noticed a strange bird flitting around in the fig tree in my backyard. It was the size and shape of a sparrow and moved about like one, but with black and white stripes on its head it was like no sparrow I had ever seen.

"Why, that's no English sparrow," I thought, "What in the world can it be?" I immediately dropped everything and went to the nearest bookstore. "Does there happen to be," I asked the clerk, "a book that would help one identify birds?"

There did happen to be, and 30 minutes later with the help of Peterson, I had identified the White Crowned Sparrow — and I was hooked.

My interest in the world of nature was of long standing. In Boy Scout days I had even qualified for a merit badge in Birding or Bird Study or whatever it was called then. One of the requirements was to list at least 50 species of birds that had been identified. My impressive list of species included such unspecific terms as sparrow, pigeon, hawk, hummingbird, seagull and sandpiper. But since my examiner knew no more about birds than I did, I was soon displaying the badge along with others on my sleeve.

Then came years of high school, college and a teaching career during which I found little time for birds. (I had, of course, the Merit Badge, so there was little yet to learn.) However, I continued to enjoy the linnet, the "English" sparrow, the mockingbird and the "blue jay" of my yard, the "seagulls" at the beach, and the "buzzard" that occasionally soared overhead.

Peterson's guide was a revelation. Perusing it convinced me that the world contained a wealth of new species (in addition to the White Crowned Sparrow) and, being a born collector, I had to go after them. The first opportunity came a few days later with the announce-

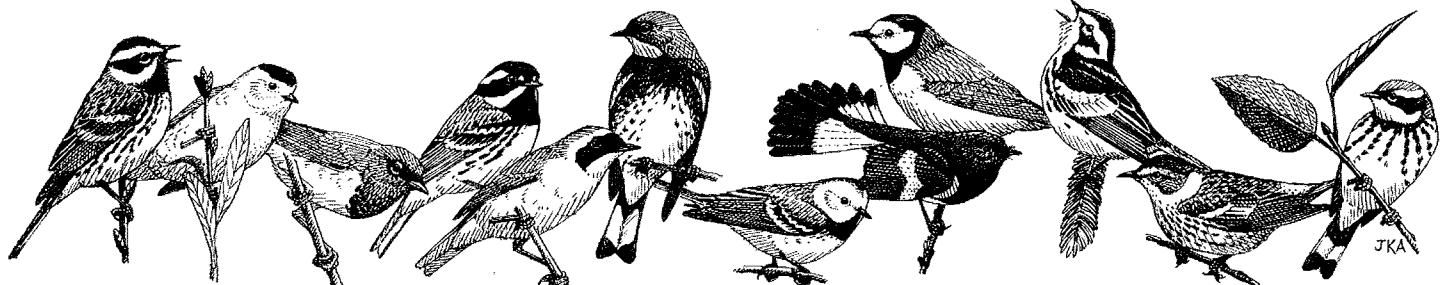
ment of a "bird walk" in Descanso Gardens. It was an area that I was very familiar with, in all of its aspects I thought, but I was introduced to tanagers and orioles and goldfinches and other wonderful, colorful neighbors that I did not know had existed. To round out "the week that was," one of the group told me about Audubon House, to which I immediately paid a visit... and my life was changed forever.

Since discovering this new world, I have birded in more than 50 countries on all seven continents.

It has been my good fortune to join birding trips in many of the world's outstanding birding areas led by many of the world's top birders, among them: Colombia with Olga and Herb Clarke, Australia with Len Robinson, Great Britain with Brian Bland, Costa Rica with Arnold Small, Cuba with Jim Clements, Thailand and Malaya with Jon Dunn and Dennis Wong, West Africa with Peter Alden, Texas with Victor Emanuel, the South Pacific with Peter Harrison, New Guinea with Brian Finch, Peru with the late Ted Parker, and the Amazon with Luis Baptista, and a long list of other areas in Africa, India and South America in the company of specialists from Questers Nature Tours, the World Wildlife Fund and Massachusetts Audubon.

Thanks to all of these I can boast a life list that includes about one third of the world's birds, over 3,200 to be more exact.

For years before my world-shaking week, I had traveled widely in many parts of the globe. But that was before I really knew there were birds, and in such places as Afghanistan, the Arab World, China, Japan and Alaska I saw no birds at all! I can do nothing but deplore those wasted opportunities. But the two decades since all that have been productive. And they have been fun. Thank you, little White-crowned Sparrow! —



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodkin

I would like to apologize for missing the September issue. When we returned from a trip to the Manu, I discovered that the computer had crashed — and for the first time since I took over the column from Kimball Garrett, I missed a deadline.

November will find the last of the vagrants going through southern California. A favorite place around the Veteran's Day holiday for the more unusual sparrows — Rusty Blackbirds, perhaps a Northern Shrike or a lingering oriole — is Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley National Park. The Salton Sea is always worth checking for the unusual and out of place, and the rarer gulls can be looked for along the coast. By November we should get a good picture of which northern species could be invading our area. Birds like Lewis' Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch are already showing up in the northern deserts (Arnold and Brian Small), so this may be shaping up as a big-invasion year.

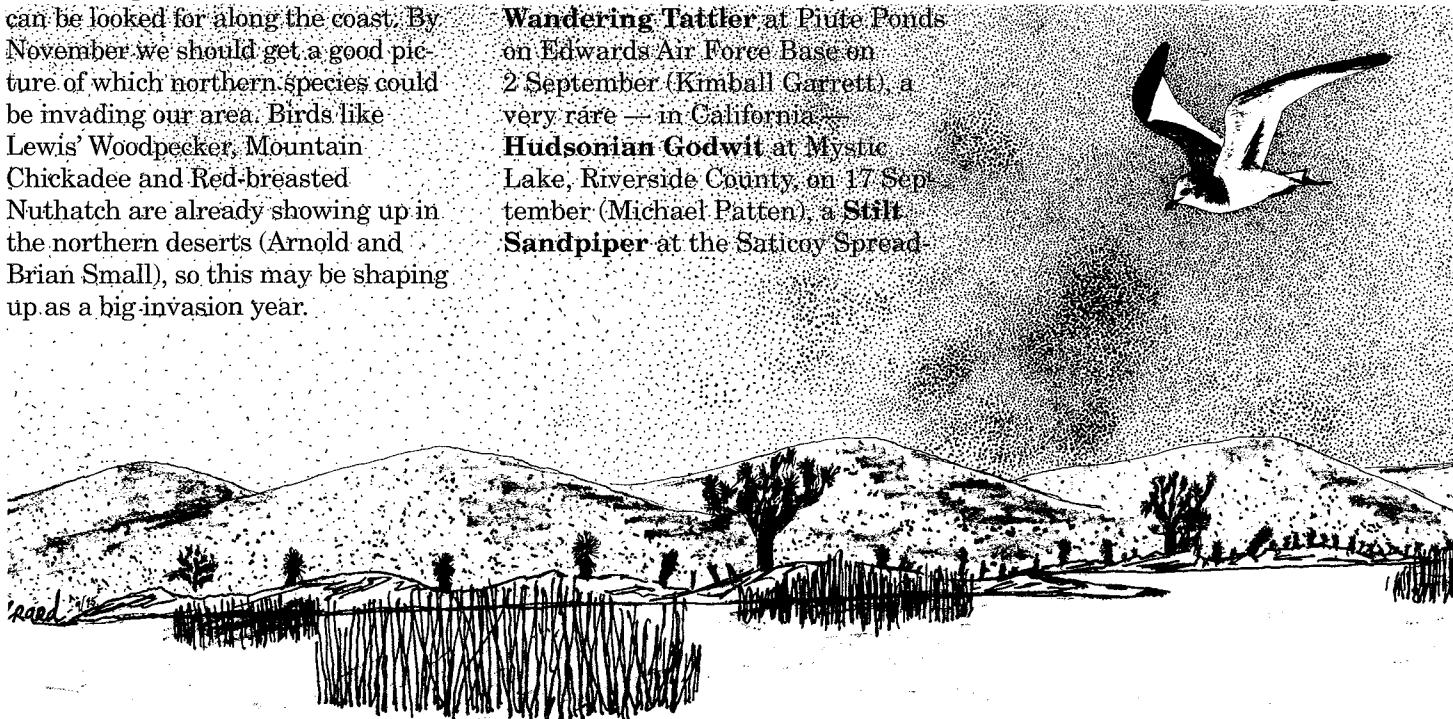
In reporting the following birds, please remember that unless I am told specifically who found a particular bird, I will credit the source of the information. I am very pleased with the number of first-hand reports coming to me by phone, letter and the Internet. I have never gotten so much direct observer information as I have received this past month. Thank you. Keep the reports coming. This is your column and can only be as good as the information I receive.

A **Little Blue Heron** was found on lower Malibu Creek on 17 September (Vernon & Andrew Howe). Interesting shorebirds found include a **Mongolian Plover** on private property near Pt. Mugu on 4 September (Don Desjardin), an inland record of the usually coastal **Wandering Tattler** at Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base on 2 September (Kimball Garrett), a very rare — in California — **Hudsonian Godwit** at Mystic Lake, Riverside County, on 17 September (Michael Patten), a **Stilt Sandpiper** at the Saticoy Spread-

ing Ponds on 2 September (DD), and a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** that first showed up at the Santa Clara River mouth on 27 August (Carl Krause) and then apparently moved to the Saticoy Ponds on 2 September (Steve Tucker) where it remained two weeks. Three **Ruff** reports — one at the Santa Clara River mouth on 25 August (AS), one at Piute Ponds on 2 September (Gerard Phillips and Charles Hood), and one at Malibu Lagoon for about ten days beginning on 9 September (John Schmitt) round out the shorebirds.

An inland **Sabine's Gull** was at Piute Ponds on 17 September (GP and Cosmo Bloom).

A **White-winged Dove** was in Harbor Park on 21 August (Jerry Johnson). A **Tropical Kingbird**



Original Pen and Ink by Gerard Phillips

was in nearby Banning Park on 13 September (Richard Barth), and **Eastern Kingbirds** were in Arcadia on 8 September (Mike San Miguel) and at Malibu Creek State Park on 16 September (Ron Lien).

A **Yellow-green Vireo** was at Galileo Park in Kern County on 21 September (John Sterling). A **Golden-winged Warbler** was there on the same day (John Hunter), and a **Blue-winged** showed up on 24 September (Doug Aguillard). A **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was found in Madrona Marsh on 24 September (RL). **Black-throated Blues** were at Camino Real Park in Ventura on 16 September (Doug Martin) and at Galileo on 24 September (Dick Norton), and a **Blackburnian** was at Galileo on 20 September (AS and Herb Clarke). Both a **Grace's** and two **Prairie warblers** were found in tamarisks on the Oxnard Plain on 23 September (ST), and a **Canada** was in Camino Real Park on 15 September (DM).

Summer Tanagers were at Peck Park on 5 September (Jon Ivanov) and at Descanso Gardens on 10 September (Steve Sosensky). A **Bobolink** was in Arcadia on 21 September (MSM), and a female-plumaged **Orchard Oriole** was at the Pepperdine Ponds, Malibu, on 24 September (KG).

California's list of Old World warblers tripled this fall with the addition of a **Lanceolated Warbler** from Southeast Farallon Island and an **Arctic Warbler** from Big Sur in September; **Dusky Warbler** is the only Old World warbler previously recorded in the state.

Good Birding! 

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

Hank Brodkin
27½ Mast Street, Marina Del Rey, CA 90292.
(310) 827-0407 E-Mail: hankb@kaiwan.com

Or call **Jon Fisher** — 818/544-5009

FIELD TRIPS

Continued from page 12

Williamson's Sapsucker. Bird nearby areas as time permits. Take the 5 Fwy N to the 118 Fwy E to the 210 Fwy W. Take the Hubbard St. offramp, turn right and then left on Eldridge St. Turn right on Sayre St. to the end. Once inside the park, turn left and then left into the first parking lot. Meet at 7:30 A.M., bird until noon, and picnic with the group to conclude the trip if you wish.

Friday, November 24 —

30-hour trip (10 P.M. Friday to 4 A.M. Sunday) on Island Packer's *M.V. Vanguard*. NW out of Ventura past Point Conception to Arquelle Canyon and W to the California continental shelf with several daylight hours along the shelf. \$250/double bunk, \$145/single bunk.

Saturday and Sunday, December 2 and 3 — Carrizo Plain.

Leader **Roy Van de Hoek**, who has spent five years conducting field research on the Plain. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in Maricopa. Good hawks, falcons, eagles and Mountain Plover. Sandhill Cranes, elk and pronghorn hopeful. If possible, please carpool or avail your vehicle to others. \$15 per person, \$5 surcharge for 1-person vehicles. 10 car limit. Your phone number will be released for carpooling unless you request otherwise. Sign up with Audubon House for exact directions and information. Reserve with California Valley Motel at (805) 475-2261, and have them annotate LAAS affiliation. Call LAAS by November 25 if lodging is full.

Sunday, December 3 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See November 5 write-up for details.

Saturday, December 9 — Newport Back Bay. Leader **Mary Carmona**. No notable high tides until later this month, but we'll still look for rails and Swamp Sparrows.

Royal Tern and California Gnatcatcher also good bets. Take the 405 Fwy S to Jamboree Rd., drive S over the channel past San Joaquin Hills Rd. to Back Bay Dr. on your right. If you hit PCH, you've gone too far. Continue to the first pullout hugging the bay along Back Bay Dr., 1/2 mile off Jamboree Rd. Meet at 8:00 A.M. for a full day in the area.

Sunday, December 10 —

Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See November 12 write-up for details.

Friday, February 2, 1996 — Deep Water Laysan Albatross

Trip. 30-hour trip (10 P.M. Friday to 4 A.M. Sunday) on Island Packer's *M.V. Vanguard*. NW out of Ventura past Point Conception to Arquelle Canyon and W to the California continental shelf with several daylight hours along the shelf. \$260/double bunk, \$150/single bunk (breakfast, lunch and dinner are included in the cost). 

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.

EVENING MEETING

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

November 14, 1995 Kimball L. Garrett Improving Your Birding Skills: An Illustrated Workshop

Kimball L. Garrett, long-time L.A. Auduboner, ornithologist at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and current president of the Western Field Ornithologists, will present a workshop on "Improving Your Birding Skills." Suggestions for honing and applying your field skills will be explored through slides, tape recordings and handouts. Topics will include: the nature of bird identification and bird finding, learning vocalizations, keeping and submitting records, and applying your birding to conservation biology.

December 12, 1995 Olga Clarke Lands of the Quetzal

Come let Olga inspire you with the lure of neotropical birding. She has been leading tours to Central America for over 20 years, and her program will feature highlights of some of those adventures.

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

Sunday, November 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 turn left into the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$5 parking fee.

Sunday, November 12 — Sepulveda Basin Natural Area. Leader **Steve Ducatman**. Some good birds have shown up here in

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the past (swans, longspur, Palm Warblers), and the habitat is improving. Sora is quite possible. Take Burbank Blvd. W from the 405 Fwy, turn right onto Woodley Ave. and continue to the Woodley Park entrance on the right. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in the first parking area.

Sunday, November 12 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Join ranger **Ray Jillson** to view resident raptors, waterbirds and songbirds. 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, 1000 Durfee Ave. \$2 voluntary donation suggested by park.

Saturday, November 18 — Veteran's Park. Leader **Doug Martin**. This has recently been found to be an excellent spot for sparrows, three goldfinches, sapsuckers and other wintering birds. Hopeful Hepatic Tanager and

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