

# WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society



*Red-shouldered Hawk by Gerard Phillips*

## BIRDING Big Santa Anita Canyon

by Mike San Miguel

Looking due east from Echo Point on the southeastern rampart of Mount Wilson, there is a deep verdant canyon whose north-facing slope and bottom are densely forested with Big Cone Spruce, large Canyon Live Oaks and a rich assortment of montane, riparian and chaparral habitats. Echo Point itself, at an elevation of 5,700 feet, and the sheer granitic walls no more than 200 yards east of the 100-inch Hooker telescope that has made the Mount so famous, form the westernmost part of Big Santa Anita Canyon. Dropping steeply from the southeast shoulder of Mount Wilson, and nearly paralleling Santa Anita Canyon about a mile to the south, is Winter Creek. These two canyons in the heart of the San Gabriel Mountains drain the majority of what is known as Big Santa Anita Canyon.

The north fork of Big Santa Anita Canyon in the center of the San Gabriel Mountains begins at Newcomb Pass. This is important because the pass is just barely above 4,000 feet, one of the lowest points in the mountain range, and provides a natural point over which birds can migrate through the barrier that is the San Gabriels. The mouth of the canyon in the northern part of Arcadia behind the Los Angeles County Flood Control Debris Basin is just downstream from Wilderness Preserve in Arcadia. It is only four miles on a direct north-south axis from Newcomb Pass. The rich diversity of habitats, the natural migration route through the mountains, the year-round running water in the cool canyon bottoms of Big Santa Anita and the water empoundment behind the debris basin for much of the year provides rich birding opportunities that go largely unappreciated and underbirded.

## **Big Santa Anita Canyon to Sturtevant Falls**

Big Santa Anita Canyon is rich with the history of mining, mountain resorts and other natural re-

sources. Much of its notoriety comes from its tradition of hiking clubs, especially during the hiking era of the early part of this century. But even today this wonderful place of peace and tranquility is rich with avifauna. The best time of year to enjoy the canyon, its tributaries and nearby areas is in May when concentrations of western migrants are moving through and in June and July at the peak of the nesting season. For the birder and naturalist it is one of the finest outdoor experiences to be found anywhere in southern California.

The easiest and most convenient access to Big Santa Anita Canyon is by Santa Anita Canyon Road which begins at the terminus of Santa Anita Avenue at the north end of Arcadia. It is only a little more than a half-hour drive from the high-rises of downtown Los Angeles up State Highway 2 and then east along the 210 Freeway to the Santa Anita offramp. From the freeway into the San Gabriels continue for five miles until the road terminates at Chantry Flats. If ever there were an easy and convenient way to relieve the stress and anxiety that many of us experience living in Los Angeles, this surely must be one of the best ways to do it.

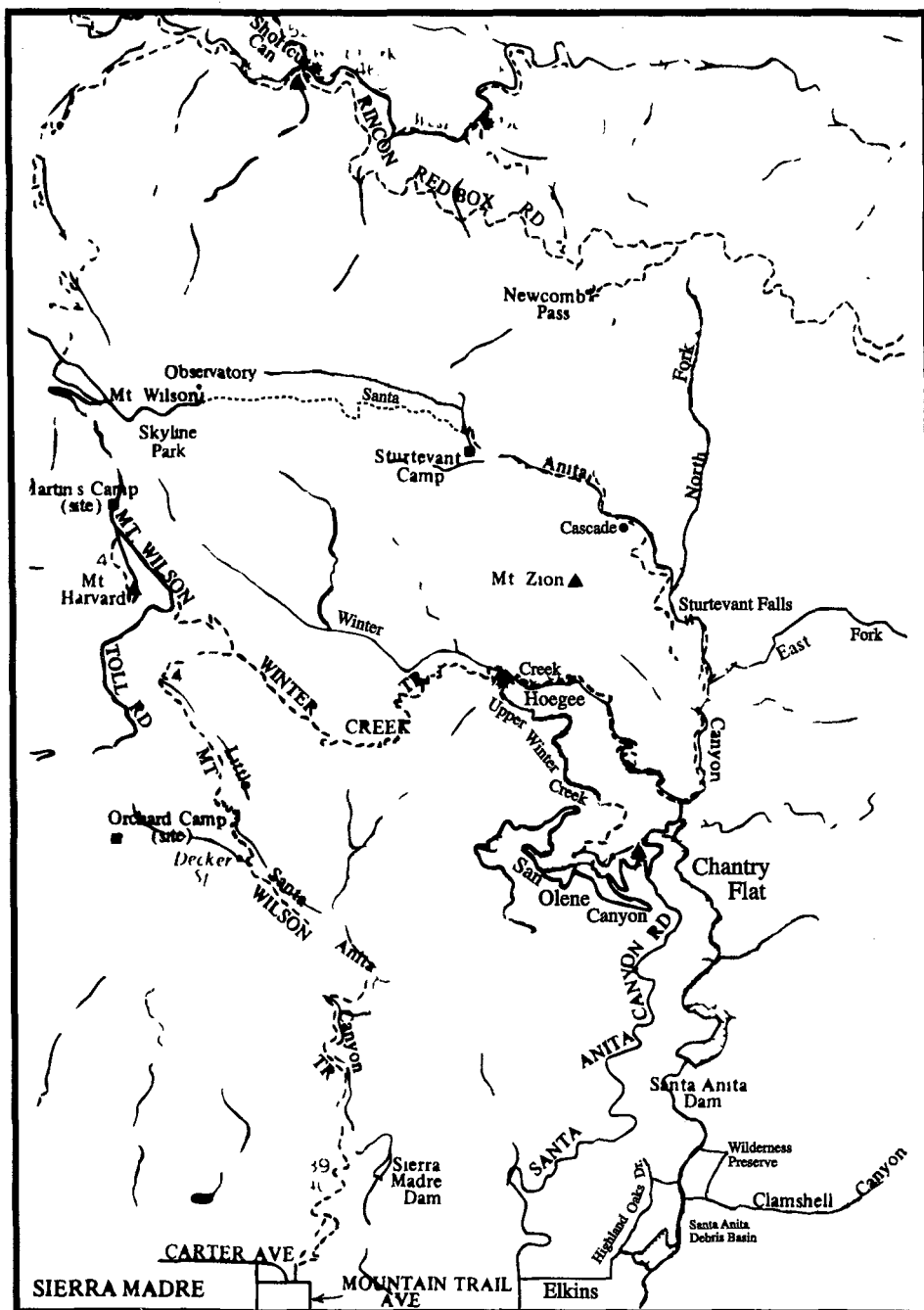
From Chantry Flats the birder has a short one-mile hike down a paved fire road to the bottom of the canyon and a beautiful streamside that supports an impressive stand of White Alders and associated riparian habitat. One more mile of hiking upstream along the streamside takes you to Sturtevant Falls. The real avian star of this rich and diverse area is the Black Swift, and Sturtevant Falls and the surrounding area is one of the most reliable places in southern California to find that species. While Black Swifts can be seen from the bottom of the canyon near the falls, they are much easier to observe in the open sky from the upper falls trail from mid-May to July. American Dippers are regularly found along the stream bottom, but in the spring and summer when human impact peaks, they move to the more secluded ar-

eas of the stream above the falls for nesting. Common riparian breeders along the canyon bottom include Pacific-slope Flycatcher, House Wren, Canyon Wren, Warbling Vireo and Yellow Warbler. In places where the canyon widens and supports a heavy understory there are still a few pairs of breeding Swainson's Thrush. Imagine listening to Canyon Wren and Swainson's Thrush singing at the same time. In June it would not be uncommon to experience this sensory treat.

The birder should also be on the lookout for resident Northern Pygmy Owls because they have been seen at Chantry Flats and in the hillside snags overlooking the canyon. Recent surveys conducted by the Forest Service show a healthy population of Spotted Owls in proper habitat throughout the San Gabriels, and one of the prime spots for this species is Santa Anita Canyon and its tributaries. Exploring the canyon at night would likely produce Spotted Owls.

## **Upper Santa Anita Canyon**

If you can get someone to drive you to the entrance of Skyline Park on Mount Wilson and shuttle another car to Chantry Flats, perhaps the most enjoyable way to experience this section of the San Gabriels is to start at the top and hike the length of the canyon from Echo Point to Hermit Falls and then up to Chantry Flats. While this hike is about eight miles, it is all downhill except for the last mile back up to the parking lot at Chantry Flats. For the birder wanting to test his physical conditioning, the reverse hike up the trail to Mount Wilson is a heart pounding and very strenuous climb of some 3,600 feet. At Echo Point the birder can easily find White-throated Swifts darting into crevices in the cliffs opposite the point, Violet-green Swallows quarreling over nesting holes in nearby snag, and Olive-sided Flycatchers proclaiming their territory. After a short but steep descent from the point through chaparral where



running water where the stream tumbles and has sliced through the hard granite that underlies and forms the core of the San Gabriels. This is a good spot for dippers, and on the drier slopes wrentits, Bewick's Wren and California Thrasher are common. A short distance below the Cascades is Sturtevant Falls. These places are shown on the above map.

## Winter Creek

In about 1886, two brothers by the name of Burlingame constructed a wagon road around the southwest ridge of Big Santa Anita Canyon and had planned to take it as far as Winter Creek. They intended to log the heavy stands of spruce out of the canyon, but before they could complete the road the San Gabriels were declared a forest preserve. Some of those old spruce trees around Hoegee Camp are the very ones saved from the logger's ax all those many years ago. Perhaps there is no more beautiful place in the San Gabriels than the three miles or so of Winter Creek which drains the southeastern slope of Mount Wilson through a steep and heavily wooded canyon. The canyon bottom and stream sides are wooded with dense and towering stands of alders, while the north-facing slope of the canyon has some of the finest forests of first growth Big Cone Spruce intermixed with large Canyon Live Oaks and California Bay Laurel to be found anywhere in southern California.

A quarter of a mile west from Chantry Flats along the San Olene fire road takes the birder to the beginning of the Upper Winter Creek Trail. The two mile hike to Hoegee Camp on the upper reach of Winter Creek is a relatively flat and easy hike. The trail winds through numerous small tributaries usually with small streams and water falls flowing in them. There is even a small stand of madrone which are rare in the San Gabriels. During spring this is a very good place to observe our western migration, especially about

Ash-throated Flycatcher and Black-headed Grosbeak are common, the birder enters a pure stand of Big Cone Spruce. The commonest breeder here is the Western Tanager, and it is abundant in the spruces in June and July. The insects which provide an ample supply of food for tanagers and their young are also thick and can be bothersome to the birder so insect repellent is advised. Anywhere in this section of the canyon where there are snags from dead spruce, Acorn Woodpeckers are common.

This is also a good place to look for Band-tailed Pigeon.

As the canyon begins to curve in a southerly direction and receives more direct sunlight, the spruce forest changes to mixed oaks and Bay Laurel where Hutton's Vireos are easily found. The trail eventually drops into the bottom of the canyon at about historic Sturtevant Camp. Again Pacific-slope Flycatchers are common breeders here. About a half mile below the camp, the trail goes through the Cascade Camp area. As its name suggests, there is very fast

mid-May when the oaks and other native vegetation are in fresh foliage and loaded with insect larvae that warblers, vireos and other insect eaters rely on to fuel them on their long migration journeys north. Once at Hoegee Camp the birder has the choice of doubling back to Chantry or to hike downstream along beautiful Winter Creek and eventually to Santa Anita Canyon and then up to Chantry Flats via the paved fire road. This loop is a little over four miles long and only moderately strenuous.

Along sections of Upper Winter Creek trail in mid-May it is not uncommon to observe nine species of western warblers along with tanagers, grosbeaks and the normal host of chaparral species. During that time, flocks of Townsend's Warblers in their bright spring plumage and mixed with Hermit, Nashville, Black-throated Gray and Wilson's warblers can be seen and heard singing in the Big Cone Spruce along the slopes of the canyon as they migrate through and over Newcomb Pass toward their northerly destinations. In the Canyon Live Oaks along the way Black-throated Gray Warblers are already on their territories, and Western Wood Pewees can be found up and down the canyon on their exposed perches. Most of our nonmigratory species can also be seen along most of the trail.

## Arcadia Wilderness Preserve

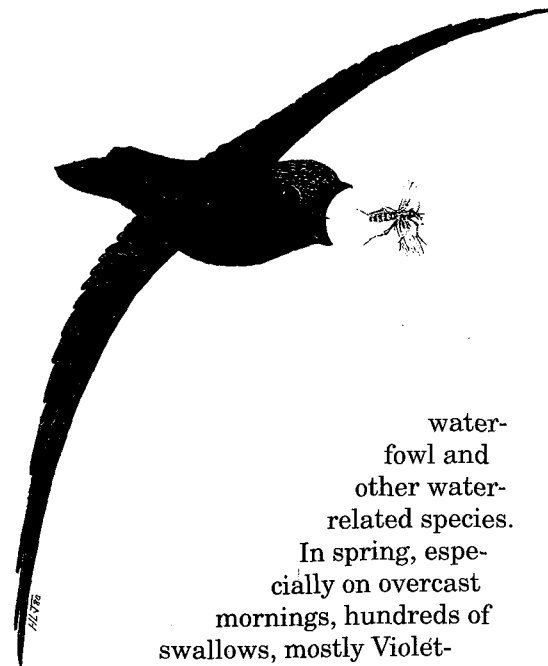
The Wilderness Preserve in Arcadia is an excellent place during spring to enjoy migration and most of our chaparral species including Nuttall's and Acorn woodpeckers, California Thrasher and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. The park is open from sunrise to sunset during *weekdays*, but to bird the park on the *weekends* you will need to contact the City Parks and Recreation Dept. at 818 574-5113 for a permit. While this may be an inconvenience, the park is very quiet and you will usually have it to yourself.

You should begin your trip at the park headquarters by picking up a checklist of the birds of preserve and surrounding area which includes 186 species. As of this writing, that number had risen to 194.

There are usually a few mountain species found in the park including Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee and Purple Finch. In April, the bottlebrush around the picnic area has simultaneously produced six species of hummingbirds, including Calliope. The birder should also be on the lookout for Swainson's Hawk in early spring as they migrate through the canyon and over the San Gabriels. Rufous-crowned Sparrows can usually be found on the steep brushy slopes on the western side of the preserve above the stream. Birding the preserve and pond behind the flood control debris dam just downstream in late April can yield an impressive day list of close to 100 species. To get to the Wilderness Preserve, take Santa Anita Ave. north for 1.4 miles to Elkins Ave. and then right down to the bottom of the hill and left on Highland Oaks Dr. Look for the Wilderness Park sign. The park entrance is about a half mile north at the top of Highland Oaks Dr.

## Santa Anita Flood Control Debris Basin

The wild rushing waters common during periods of heavy winter rain in Santa Anita Canyon have long since been tamed by flood control projects beginning in the 1930s when Big Anita Dam was constructed. In the early '60s, a large debris basin was built at the mouth of the canyon. This basin forms a pond that often provides a permanent source of water and adds a habitat dimension not normally found along the hot, dry south-facing slope of the San Gabriels. After periods of heavy winter rains, there are decent numbers of wintering



water-  
fowl and  
other water-  
related species.

In spring, especially on overcast mornings, hundreds of swallows, mostly Violet-green and Cliff, can be seen feeding over the pond. Large flocks of Vaux's Swifts can also be found during that time. From late April through early August this is the most reliable place in the L.A. Basin to observe Purple Martin. They are usually seen in the evening foraging over the pond. The pond can be reached by hiking a few hundred yards south from Wilderness Preserve along the fire road on the west side of the canyon.

In the fall, when most of the pond has dried to only shallow puddles and mudflats, there is usually an abundance of weeds and grasses that produce large quantities of seed. When conditions are ideal there can be hundreds of sparrows and other seed eaters feeding in this area. During the fall of 1984, this author banded 425 Lazuli Buntings, 5 Indigo Buntings, 650 Savannah Sparrows and over 1,000 White-crowned Sparrows in a period of only two months. Common Yellowthroat, Blue Grosbeak, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow are common, as well as smaller numbers of other seed eaters. The stands of willows surrounding the pond should be checked for vireos and warblers.

During most of the year resident Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk and American Kestrel can be found foraging over the pond and surrounding foot-

hill areas. In the fall, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Merlins are frequently seen moving through the area and hunting. The area has also produced some vagrant surprises including Northern Saw-whet Owl, Eastern Kingbird, Blackpoll Warbler, American Redstart, Bobolink and Indigo Bunting (almost every year).

The upstream edges of the basin have water seeps in the fall that produce habitat for Common Snipe, an occasional Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat and, in recent years, Swamp Sparrow. The mudflats have produced Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper and Killdeer, which are residents. In the late fall and winter, after the rains have started, there is usually enough water for a variety of duck species including Mallard, which are resident, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead and several other duck species.

Whether you choose a strenuous hike into the San Gabriels to enjoy spring migration or prefer a casual stroll in a quiet park setting, there is plenty of variety for the birder in all parts of Big Santa Anita Canyon and many of its tributaries. Its added attraction is its convenience and ease of access whether you want to bird for an hour or backpack into some of the campgrounds scattered through this beautiful and relatively underbirded part of Los Angeles County. ➤



## References

- Garrett, K. and Dunn, J. 1981. *The Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution*. Los Angeles Audubon Society, Los Angeles, CA.
- Robinson, J. W. 1991. *The San Gabriels: The Mountain Country from Soledad Canyon to Lytle Creek*. Big Santa Anita Historical Society, Arcadia, CA.
- . 1971. *Trails of the Angeles: 100 Hikes in the San Gabriels*. Wilderness Press, Berkeley, CA.

# Members' Annual Photo Contest

February 13, 1996

- 1st Prize — \$50 gift certificate to the LAAS Bookstore  
2nd Prize — \$35 gift certificate to the LAAS Bookstore  
3rd Prize — \$25 gift certificate to the LASS Bookstore

## Rules and Regulations

- ◆ Participation is limited to members of LAAS or current subscribers to the *Western Tanager*.
- ◆ Each contestant may submit up to five 35mm slides for consideration.
- ◆ Only images taken of free and unrestrained birds are acceptable.
- ◆ Slides must be submitted by 7:30 P.M. on the evening of the contest.
- ◆ Contestants must be present to win.
- ◆ Write your name on each slide and place a red dot in the upper right corner of the slide (right side up) to orient placement in the slide tray.

The winning photos will be printed in the *Western Tanager*. Join us for a FUN evening. Cheer your favorite slides. Your enthusiasm is necessary if this is to be a successful event.

## UPDATE

# Let's Not Get Seasick

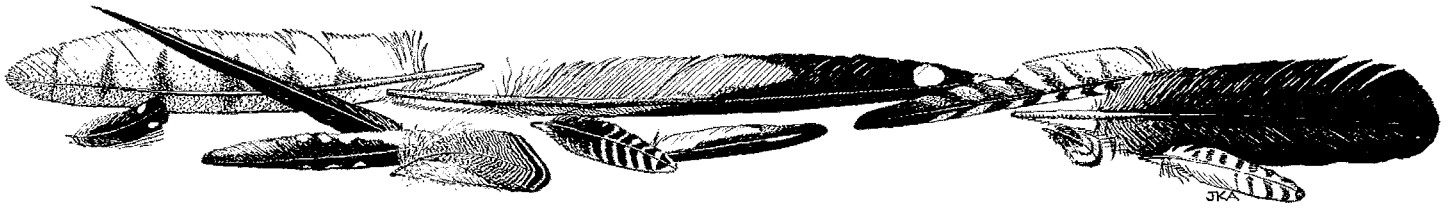
In the January/February, 1991 issue of *Western Tanager*, we printed an article with the latest state-of-the-art solutions to the tribulations of *mal-de-mer*. It has recently come to our attention that the "patch" has been taken off the market. Not to fear — another ancient remedy has surfaced and seems to work like a charm!

From China comes "White Flower, an Analgesic Balm." A tiny bottle of this wonderful elixir will last for years of turbulent pelagic trips. If you anticipate feeling uneasy, you only have to daub a small

drop of this therapeutic liquid on your upper lip just below the nostrils and *voila!* The stomach is calm! The author can personally attest to this remedy's effectiveness.

White Flower can be purchased from *Wandering Tattler*, a catalog sales business in Stockton. The price is \$5 per bottle. They also carry the motion "wristbands" mentioned in the 1991 article at a cost of \$6.80 per pair. (Sales tax and shipping are extra.) Call *Wandering Tattler* at 800/231-9209.

Good luck. Remember, the birds are worth it! ➤



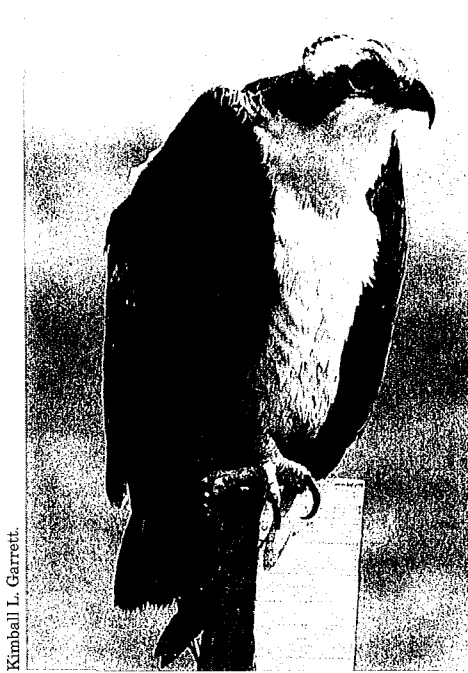
# A C C L O S E R L O O K

by Kimball L. Garrett

**T**he Osprey ought to be a familiar bird. After all, it enjoys the widest worldwide range of any raptor except the Peregrine Falcon. Furthermore, it is a large and conspicuous bird with its bold blackish and white coloration and a penchant for perching openly and flying over (and sometimes splashing into) open bodies of water.

Yet we here in southern California are hardly blasé about these magnificent fish-eaters. We live in something of a pandionally-challenged region, at least compared to the rivers, lakes and sea-coasts of northern California and to the coast of Baja south of us. There, Ospreys flourish in fish-rich waters. In our region this species is mainly a transient, although the numbers that pass through are probably underappreciated. Ospreys move along our coast through much of the fall, from late August through October, perhaps at the rate of a few per day. I rarely spend a day birding in fall along the Malibu coastline without seeing one or two Ospreys winging eastward overhead. Many also pass through the interior, stopping for an hour or two, or for a few days, at reservoirs such as Castaic Lake, Lake Palmdale or Lake Silverwood. Even in spring Ospreys are often seen moving along the San Gabriel Mountain foothills with Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed and Swainson's hawks, accipiters and harriers. Our larger reservoirs and coastal estuaries usually harbor an Osprey or two throughout the winter.

Many factors have pushed and pulled at Osprey populations in the past hundred years, a time period




*Osprey at Estero Punta Banda, Baja California Norte, 8 October 1995.*

certainly deleterious to Osprey populations from mid-century on. Disturbance at nest sites, loss of nesting trees, shooting and the loss of most of our anadromous fish stocks were all important factors. On the positive side, the creation of many new reservoirs and protection from shooting have somewhat brightened the Osprey's gloomy picture. There have been scattered Osprey nestings or nest attempts in southern California in recent years, with the Owens Valley hosting the nearest consistent nesting sites. A good historical account of Osprey populations in California, and especially the central California coast, is found in Dave Shuford's *Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas* (Bush-tit Books, 1993), one of the most important books yet written on California ornithology.

## OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

over which they have declined severely in southern California. Some 19th century references suggest that Ospreys were common on the mainland, and more recent workers agree they were common on the Channel Islands well into the present century. Their rapid decline during the first half of this century predated the consequences of DDT residues, although such toxins were

In summary, the Osprey is one of those birds that we see regularly in small numbers, but about whose comings and goings we know precious little. It is a bird about which we could learn a great deal through standardized, regular hawk-watching efforts during migration, something southern Californians have been slow in developing. Any takers? 

# Unexpected Encounters at Malibu

by Larry Allen

**A**lthough the primary use of the continent-wide series of Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) is the monitoring of regional trends in avian abundance, the most intriguing part of any count is often the discovery of a single, out-of-place, totally unexpected bird. The serendipitous conjunction of "lost" bird and assiduous birdwatcher brings a jolt of adrenaline to the lucky finder, a smile to the face of the count compiler, and often a rush of fellow birders anxious to view the rarity.

Over its forty-year history, the Malibu CBC has had its share of these rarities. Of course, "rare" and "unexpected" are relative terms, and we can discern several categories of rarities showing up in count reports. There's the "pretty common but just not here" category: Rough-legged Hawk, Williamson's Sapsucker, Pygmy Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Solitaire and Steller's Jay. Then there's the "pretty common but not just now:" Common Poorwill, Solitary Vireo, and Hermit and Wilson's Warblers. Then there's the "a few somewhere every fall or winter" type: Red-necked Grebe, Oldsquaw, Franklin's Gull, Palm Warbler and Swamp Sparrow.

Over the years, the Malibu count has had its share of the "more or less unexpected" birds: Ancient Murrelet, Tennessee, Cape May, Pine and Worm-eating warblers, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush and Rusty Blackbird. And then there's the "you found *what*?" category.

Perhaps foremost in the latter was the Piping Plover reported in 1973, although in truth the bird was not discovered on count day — it had been present much of the fall, but is nevertheless one of the three California records for this species. An equally unexpected appearance was the Painted Redstart discov-

ered in 1982. And just three years ago a Le Conte's Sparrow was discovered at Malibu Creek State Park.

As you can tell from reviewing this sampling of rarities from the Malibu CBC, there is no single habitat in which the "good" birds are all found. You, as a count participant, can "expect the unexpected" in whatever portion of the count circle you bird. But *you won't be able to find anything if you don't participate!* So call me, Larry Allen, at 213 221-2022 and volunteer for your section of the count circle.

Oh yes, I can guarantee at least one unexpected thing to show up on count day — the *prize* for best bird at our post-count pizza party. Don't miss it! ~

## Christmas Bird Counts sponsored by Los Angeles Audubon Society

**Saturday, December 16:  
Antelope Valley.** Compiler  
Fred Heath 805 389-3203. Call  
for assignment.

**Sunday, December 17:  
Malibu.** Compiler Larry Allen  
213 221-2022. Call for assign-  
ment or if you decide at the last  
minute to participate, meet at  
8:00 A.M. in the west parking  
lot at Tapia Park.

**Los Angeles. We urgently  
need a compiler for this  
count!** You won't have to  
"reinvent the wheel." Maps,  
checklists and instructions are  
available from prior years. If  
you can assist, please call Au-  
dubon House at 213 876-0202.

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# CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Mike San Miguel

Once again, the flood control engineers at the county and the Corps of Engineers, in their shortsighted and very narrow view about the Los Angeles River as a flood control conveyance only, have rushed headlong to crank up the big machines and pour concrete for a project that will further isolate the river in complete disregard and insensitivity for the overall needs of the people living in the county. Now, as has always been the case, they have no plans to enhance or improve the tremendous environmental and habitat potential the river possesses. The American Rivers Association has listed the L.A. River among the most endangered river systems in the country... and for good reason. If our river isn't already dead, current plans for its "improvement" will hasten its demise.

The county and the Corps are about to begin construction of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area Project (LACDA), which will cost taxpayers a mind boggling \$350 million over the next eight years.

included in the project plans. While there is no question or argument about the need for adequate flood protection along the lower reaches of the river system, there are less expensive and far more beneficial alternatives which could be implemented that the project proponents have not adequately evaluated. The savings could be spent on some of the other pressing needs of the county to improve environmental quality, among other things.

When a few members of LAAS learned about the LACDA Project — and that Friends of the Los Angeles River (FOLAR), Tree People and Heal the Bay had filed a suit to block the Project until important environmental and community issues could be addressed — LAAS joined the suit as co-petitioners. The suit is intended to force the county and the Corps to come to the table with the multitude of stakeholders interested in the river to reach consensus about how best to utilize and enhance all the river has to offer the community.

the petitioners have reached the point where the county and the Corps may reach a settlement. As it is now proposed, the settlement resolves conflicts over the adequacy of the environmental analysis and review of alternatives to the LACDA project as currently adopted by the County Board of Supervisors. Most importantly, there appears to be agreement on the scope of a feasibility study for a Los Angeles Watershed Management Plan which states:

"The scope of the feasibility study shall be expanded to address, in addition to opportunities for environmental restoration along the Los Angeles River, opportunities within the Los Angeles River watershed to preserve and restore the integrity of the ecosystem through management of aquatic and related resources, to provide for water conservation, to improve water quality, to improve stormwater management and runoff control, to enhance the existing recreation features and facilities, to identify the potential for new recreation development and to improve aesthetics in the watershed."

The settlement would also result in the establishment of a Los Angeles River Watershed Study Advisory Task Force, to be funded in part up to \$250,000 by the county. The Task Force will be responsible for hammering out recommendations, based on the plan's scope, for the county and the Corps to implement into the LACDA project. If settlement is reached, it would mark the first time since the 1920s — when alteration of the river began in earnest — that a truly meaningful Watershed Management Plan could be implemented to restore the river's

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*I will not be satisfied  
until there are steelhead once again  
running in the river.*

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The LACDA Project calls for the construction of parapet walls up to eight feet tall, armoring several sections of channel wall and raising every roadway bridge over the channels through the project area. As it now stands, not one bit of environmental or habitat improvement is

Until now, the county, in all of its usual intransigence to engage in a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders, has been reluctant to move forward with the project. However, skillful and intense negotiations during the past two months by the environmental lawyers representing

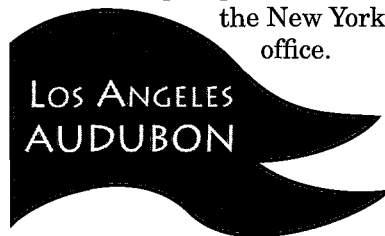


ecosystems. This would be a *big* first step to improve the river.

When the time comes, your involvement and participation in the public meetings and the decision process will be essential if our river is to be restored to even a portion of its previous environmental and habitat quality. In the near future, through the pages of this newsletter, you will be informed about further developments regarding the suit's settlement and what you can do to help. As Lewis MacAdams, founder of FOLAR and the driving force behind the movement to restore the river's ecosystem, states, "I will not be satisfied until there are steelhead once again running in the river." I would add to that vision that we as members of LAAS and leaders of the environmental community shouldn't be happy until there are also mudflats and suitable habitat along the river for shorebirds and songbirds to rest during their long migration. 🐾

## Staying L.A.

**S**ome members wish to remain with a chapter indefinitely, regardless of where they move. We can "freeze" a member's chapter affiliation at the member's written request. (Members must request permanent chapter assignment themselves. It cannot be requested for them.) Members should send their requests to the Membership Department in the New York office.



## Audubon's Strategic Plan: Implementing Its Vision

**L**ast June the National Audubon Society Board of Directors adopted a Strategic Plan for the organization. This Strategic Plan, which was developed in partnership with chapter leaders, state council members and staff, provides an exciting vision for Audubon's future: a vision where Audubon's focus is birds, wildlife and habitat; a vision that puts the emphasis on public policy advocacy and education through increased support and programs to our chapters, state councils and field offices; a vision which calls for a seamless Audubon where all parts are working together from member to chapter to national board. A vision that makes Audubon the most effective conservation organization in the country whether on a local, state or national level. A vision that takes us back to our roots and makes us stronger.

In the plan, there are many exciting initiatives, from establishment of Audubon centers in communities to state field offices being created across the country; from increasing the reach and capacity of our technological communications to building a solid science program which will reinforce our education and grassroots advocacy campaigns. In these and other areas outlined in the plan, implementation actions must be put forward to turn the plan into a reality.

A Strategic Plan Coordination Office has been established to work with ten implementation committees to get this plan off the shelf and into budgets, staffing and programs. These changes will benefit our work on the ground for birds, wildlife and their habitat. As Audubon President John Flicker points out, "These implementation committees are where the rubber meets the road."

The following ten implementation committees were selected based on major themes in the plan:

1. Field
2. Grassroots
3. Campaigns/Issues
4. Education
5. Audubon Centers
6. Science
7. Communications
8. Membership/New Revenue
9. Human Resources
10. Finance/Fund-raising

Each committee has National Audubon Society Board, staff and chapter representatives. Their charge is simple — to propose specific actions to the full National Audubon Society Board which will result in the successful implementation of the plan. Already, early actions have been given the green light. The first prototype field office is scheduled to be established in California this fall. New grassroots communication technologies involving computers and conference calling are being field tested in the states of Washington and New York. A National Campaign selection process for Audubon is being developed for use prior to our 1996 convention.

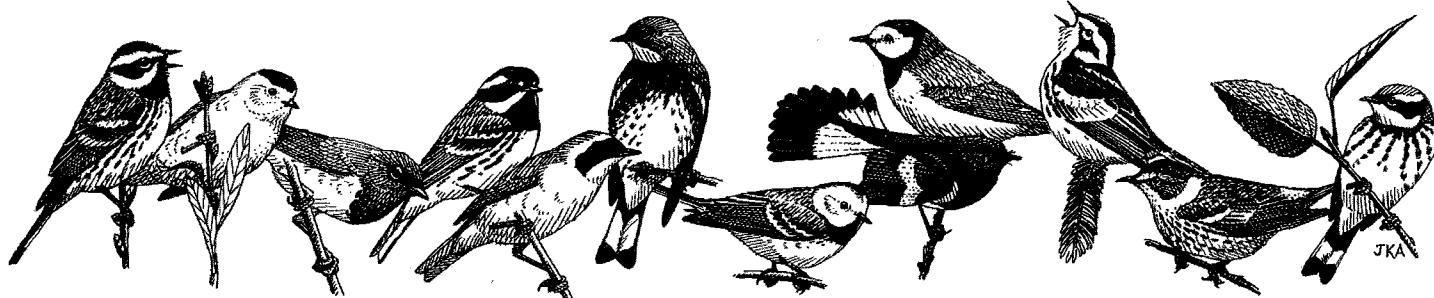
Your continued involvement is key. You are invited to participate by sharing your ideas on the specific implementation issues any one of the committees are facing. Background information on each implementation committee is available as well as progress reports on actions being recommended by contacting:

David Miller  
Strategic Plan  
Coordination Office  
1789 Western Avenue  
Albany, NY 12203

518 869-9731 (phone)  
518 869-0737 (fax)  
dmillerEaudubon.org (internet)



We hope you will join us in this exciting moment in Audubon's proud history. Help us make the vision in Audubon's Strategic Plan indeed a reality. 🐾



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

**D**ecember — when wintering bird populations become more or less stable — is the month of the Christmas Bird Count. Started on Christmas Day of 1900 by 27 conservationists as a reaction to the quaint custom of seeing how many birds could be killed on Christmas Day, the CBC was taken under the wing of the National Audubon Society. The most recent statistics available are of the 1993 Christmas Count as reported in *FIELD NOTES*, Volume 48, No. 4. Some 44,478 participants, mostly in North America, but also in the Neotropics and Hawaii, Guam and Saipan, roamed the countryside or watched feeders and counted every bird seen on the day of their count. The count of individual birds was 105,875,790 — making this by far the largest biological census ever attempted.

On Page 7 of this issue, you will find a list of local counts. If you are going out of town for the holidays, chances are there will be a count at your destination. Whatever your level of expertise, there is a place for you. So call the compiler of your chosen census and try to nail down the area in which you will be counting. Part of the fun is going out before the day of the count and scouting for uncommon birds — for even though there is a definite scientific purpose to the counts, there just might be a hint of competition. Please join in and share the fun!



This fall season has seen an influx of many interesting out-of-range species. Be on the lookout for

**Harris' Hawks** — at least five are back at Borrego Springs. Evidence of breeding in southern California should be looked for.

A **Broad-winged Hawk** was reported from Furnace Creek, Death Valley National Park, on 30 September (Howard King and Bill Moromarco).

On 23 September, two **Sabine's Gulls** were at Lake Palmdale, and three more were at Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base (Gerard Phillips et al). An **Arctic Tern**, extremely rare inland, was seen at the north end of the Salton Sea (Mike Patten).

Between ten and twenty thousand **Vaux' Swifts** were in downtown Los Angeles in late September and October (Kimball Garrett). A **Broad-billed Hummingbird** was at Mason Park, Orange County, on 14 October (Brian Daniels). Two immature **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were at Galileo Park near California City, Kern County, on 18 October (Gail Hightower and Jim Stevens).

A **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** was in Sepulveda Basin on 1 October (Jim Royer). A **Gray Catbird** was found near California City on 30 September (Bill Baker and Robert Hewitt), and a **Sage Thrasher** was in Banning Park, Harbor City, on 20 October (Jon Ivanov). A **Sprague's Pipit** was seen just before it was dispatched by a **Loggerhead Shrike** in Desert Center, Riverside County, on 1 October.

This is the fall of the rare vireos! There were no fewer than three **Philadelphias** — 30 September in Irvine (Robb Hamilton), 10 October in Big Sycamore Canyon (Arnold

Small) and 14 October on the Oxnard Plain (Richard Barth); and two local **Yellow-greens**, one at Banning Park on 7 October (Bruce Broadbooks, Jon Fisher and Mike San Miguel), and the other in lower Zuma Canyon on 14 October (KG).

Warbler reports include: a **Virginia's** on the Oxnard Plain on 1 October (Steve Tucker); a **Chestnut-sided** at Banning Park on 30 September (Tom Wurster); **Magnolias** at Galileo on 24 September (GP) and in Elysian Park on 18 October (KG); a **Black-throated Blue** on 28 September in Banning Park (Kevin Larson and Peter Shaw); a **Black-throated Green** in Big Sycamore Canyon on 10 October (AS); **Blackburnians** on the Oxnard Plain on 2 October (David Richardson) and at Malibu's Pepperdine Ponds on 14 October (RB); **Prairies**, all on 30 September, at Manhattan Beach Sand Dune Park (Laurie Conrad and TW), near California City (RH) and on San Miguel Island (AS); **Palms** at Legg Lake, Whittier Narrows, on 30 September (Larry Schmah), on the Oxnard Plain on 1 October (ST) and at Sepulveda Basin on 7 October (Jean Brandt and Phil Sayre); and a **Black-and-White** at Tapia Park on 2 October (Dick Norton).

A **Hepatic Tanager** turned up for the third winter at Veteran's Park in Sylmar on 10 October (Doug Martin), and a **Summer Tanager** was seen in Big Sycamore Canyon on 11 October (RB). A **Baltimore Oriole** was at Harbor Park on 1 October (MSM and TW).

As 1995 draws to a close, I would like to wish all of you the happiest of holiday seasons. My thanks go to

those who have called in, mailed me your sightings or otherwise made them accessible to me and the southern California birding community at large.

I would especially like to thank my editor, Jean Brandt, as well as Kimball Garrett who checks each column for accuracy and is always ready with good advice. And my loving thanks go to my wife, Priscilla, who this past year has slogged through rainforest mud, desert sand and rocky mountain canyons with me — and who has put up with my grouchiness while insisting that I meet the deadline.

Good Birding! 🐦

**R**ecords 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 Brodtkin**

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

Or call **Jon Fisher** — 818 544-5009

**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.

## FIELD TRIPS

*Continued from page 12*

**Sunday, December 10 —**

**Whittier Narrows Regional Park.** Join ranger **Ray Jillson** to view resident raptors, waterbirds and songbirds. Yellow-breasted Chat and Cardinal possible. 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, December 16 — Antelope Valley Christmas Bird Count.**

Compiler **Fred Heath**  
805 389-3203. Call for assignment.

**Sunday, December 17 — Malibu Christmas Bird Count.**

Compiler **Larry Allen** 213 221-2022. Call for assignment or meet at 8:00 A.M. in the west parking lot at Tapia Park.

**Sunday, January 7 — Topanga State Park.** Leader **Gerry Haigh.**

Meet at 8:00 A.M. See December 3 write-up for details.

**Sunday, January 14 — Whittier Narrows.** Leader **Ray Jillson.**

Meet at 8:00 A.M. See December 10 write-up for details.

**Friday, January 19 — Gull Study Workshop.**

**Larry Allen** will discuss the important skills of ageing and describing a gull by feather groupings. Slides, skins and hand-outs will demonstrate ID marks of west coast gulls — from Western to Thayer's and Little to Glaucous — in various plumages. Meet at 7:30 P.M. at Audubon House. Fee: \$5 for lecture and field trip. Reservation with Audubon House by check required. Limited to 22 participants. See field trip listing below.

**Sunday, January 21 — Gull Study Field Trip.**

**Larry Allen** will stop from Malibu Lagoon to McGrath State Beach looking for gulls to demonstrate points made during Friday session. Thayer's

Gull likely. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at Malibu Lagoon parking lot kiosk. Free parking on Cross Creek Rd. just W of lagoon bridge. Will finish at McGrath State Park in Oxnard. Walk-ons OK for field trip only. Fee: \$5 for lecture and field trip or \$3 for field trip only. Bring lunch, NGS field guide and scopes for a full day.

**Sunday, January 28 — Point Mugu.** **Bart Lane, Irwin**

**Woldman** and a base biologist will lead in this limited access area. Peregrine Falcon and White-winged Scoter frequently seen. Also rare birds such as Tropical Kingbird, Black Scoter and Oldsquaw. *Sign up by January 13 required.* Must be at least 16 years old. No cameras. 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 101 Fwy W to Las Posas Rd. S, to PCH N onto Wood Rd. W. Head S on frontage road to lot at the main (#2) gate. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

**Sunday, January 28 — Franklin Canyon.** Leader **Steven Saffier.**

Franklin Canyon is located between Sherman Oaks and Beverly Hills. Over 20 Wood Ducks and a Mandarin Duck have been regular in the lake recently. Chaparral, lakeside and oak/pine woodland habitat. From 101 Fwy, take Coldwater Cyn. S into the hills. Immediately after Mulholland Dr. merges from the W with Coldwater Cyn., make a 90° right turn onto Franklin Cyn. and continue on to the Nature Center. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in the parking lot past a gated drive on the left.

📍 **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 Arquello 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). 🐦



# EVENING MEETING

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

**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.

**January 9, 1996 Roy van de Hoek**  
**Carrizo Plain — A Grassland National Park?**

The Carrizo Plain is the last southern California prairie and winter home for Rough-legged and Ferruginous hawk, Merlin, Sandhill Crane, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew and Mountain Bluebird. With nesting species such as Golden Eagle and Short-eared Owl and possibly the California Condor in the near future, as well as some unique mammals such as the Pronghorn Antelope, Tule Elk, Kit Fox and Kangaroo Rat, see and hear in this richly illustrated talk why Carrizo Plain could easily qualify as a national park.

## 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**

**Saturday and Sunday, December 2 and 3 — Carrizo Plain.**  
Leader **Roy van de Hoek**. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in Maricopa. Good hawks,

falcons, eagles and Mountain Plover. Sandhill Cranes, elk and pronghorn hopeful. Carpool or avail your vehicle to others. \$15 per person, \$5 surcharge for one-person vehicles. 10 car limit. Your phone number will be released for carpooling unless you request otherwise. Sign up with Audubon House for directions and info. Call California Valley Motel at 805 475-2261 and have them note LAAS affiliation. Call LAAS by November 25 if lodging is full.

**Sunday, December 3 — 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.

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

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**Saturday, December 9 — Newport Back Bay.** Leader **Mary Carmona** will 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 along Back Bay Dr., 1/2 mile off Jamboree Rd. Meet at 8:00 A.M. for a full day in the area.

*Continued on page 11*