

WESTERN TANAGER



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Ah, the desert. Sun-baked rocks, gnarled mesquite, spiny cacti, sword-leaved agaves, drifting sands, whispering pines, stark vistas... wait, wait — *whispering pines?* What kind of desert are we talking about here?



the Hot, the Dry, the Beautiful

BIRDING CALIFORNIA'S EAST MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE

by Larry Allen



upper left: Joshua Tree Woodland near Cima Dome
upper right: Grassland at the head of Cedar Canyon
lower left: Great Basin Sagebrush Scrub in the Mid-Hills
lower right: Creosote Bush Scrub in the Ivanpah Valley



The eastern portion of California's Mojave Desert has all this, and more. With elevations ranging from around 800 feet on the desert floor to nearly 8,000 feet on Clark Mountain, the eastern Mojave has a range of habitats far removed from those few pictured in the popular stereotype of "desert." As befits such a variegated scene, the area is avifaunally rich as well.

THE PRESERVE

A small fraction of this area is now included in the 1.4 million acre East Mojave National Preserve. The Preserve encompasses extensive samples of major desert habitats, as well as some that are unusual anywhere in the Mojave. Each habitat (a combination of plant association and topography) provides a niche for one or more

avian specialists, and serves the needs of species whose requirements are more eclectic.

There are perceptible but hard-to-quantify variations within many individual habitats, however, and these variations influence which species are present. There are also extensive areas where habitats blend, and these areas often support a richer mix of birds than

would be expected from the species in each of the associated habitats. [I will use the terminology in Thorne (1976) to describe habitats; Jaeger (1941) provides a useful guide to plants in the area.]

The typical eastern Mojave vista is that of a vast "sea" of creosote bush and Joshua trees surrounding isolated mountain "islands" crowned with junipers and pinyon pines. At the lowest elevations are playas—salt flat remnants of Pleistocene lakes, devoid of most plant (and bird) life. These playas are surrounded by a ring of Alkali Scrub supporting Horned Lark and Black-throated Sparrow.

As we ascend, we find Creosote Bush Scrub (1,800–3,300 ft.), characterized by creosote bush and burro bush, interspersed with yuccas, other scrub and cacti. Resident birds are Horned Lark, Verdin and Black-throated Sparrow.

A bit higher is Joshua Tree Woodland (3,300–5,300 ft.), indicated by the presence of Joshua trees, but often associated with numerous shrubs (including creosote bush), other yuccas, cacti (hedgehog, barrel, beavertail and cholla) and, following wet winters, many annuals. Highly variable, this habitat ranges in a continuum from "forest" where Joshua trees are very close together (average trunk spacing 15 ft. or so) to a "woodland" with Joshua trees more widely spaced, and numerous other plants outnumbering them. Typical birds in the denser stands are Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Cactus Wren and Black-throated Sparrow, with more open habitats adding Western Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, Bendire's Thrasher and Scott's Oriole.

At comparable elevations in other locations we find Semi-succulent Scrub, which is similar to Joshua Tree Woodland except that Mojave yucca replaces Joshua trees, and chollas are somewhat more evident. The birds are similar to those found in Joshua Tree Woodland, although Bendire's Thrasher are less likely and Black-headed Grosbeak, Phainopepla and migrants more

likely. Hilly areas may support Crissal Thrasher.

Widespread on the higher slopes is Pinyon-Juniper Woodland (5,300–7,000 ft.), which is dominated by singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper. This community also includes scrub oak, yuccas, cacti and sagebrush. As with the Joshua tree association, this habitat ranges in a continuum from a forest of relatively dense stands to open woodland with widely spaced pinyons and junipers, intermixed with substantially more numerous shrubs, yuccas and cacti. Birds typical of the forest include Western Screech-Owl, Scrub Jay, Pinyon Jay, Plain Titmouse, Bushtit, Bewick's Wren and Black-throated Gray Warbler, with Crissal Thrasher, Rufous-sided Towhee and Black-chinned and Brewer's sparrow in more open areas.

Great Basin Sagebrush Scrub (5,500–7,000 ft.) forms a more-or-less continuous carpet at several locations in the Mid-Hills area. It is almost always associated with an isolated juniper or two. Typical birds are Black-throated Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow and occasionally Bendire's Thrasher. On Clark Mountain is a patch of Montane Forest (above 7,000 ft.) with white fir. You can search there for montane species such as Mountain Chickadee, Western Bluebird and Dark-eyed Junco.

A variety of specialized habitats is found throughout the area. Most prominent are the numerous washes, almost invariably sandy. These may intergrade into the surrounding terrain or form distinct arroyos with vertical banks. Characteristic birds are Gambel's Quail and Verdin, with occasional LeConte's Thrasher at lower elevations. Often the watercourse is essentially bare, but larger washes may support Desert Microphyll Woodland with more-or-less dense stands of mesquite, cat-claw acacia and desert willow in the wash bottom. These support Ladder-backed Woodpecker and migrants in season.

Rock Outcrops, cliffs, and canyons are common in mountainous

areas. Rock Wren are widely distributed, Canyon Wren more local, and ravens and raptors roost and breed on selected cliff faces. Springs are generally associated with the bases of cliffs or the heads of canyons; many are on private property and most have been "improved" for the benefit of habitations and livestock. These are attractive to residents and migrants alike. Structures may be present anywhere, and include settlements, active mines, individual buildings, corrals, wells and stock watering tanks. Fremont cottonwood and tamarisk are the usual trees, if there are any. House Finch and House Sparrow are the usual birds, but Rock Dove, Northern Raven, European Starling and Brown-headed Cowbird may be present.

Certain bird species are sufficient generalists that they may be found throughout the area almost independent of habitat. Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl and House Finch are resident species with such eclectic habitat tolerances, and Black-throated Sparrow are almost as widely distributed. In the summer, Turkey Vulture, Mourning Dove, Costa's Hummingbird and Ash-throated Flycatcher share these tolerances. Golden Eagles utilize lower elevations in the winter but, in my experience, retreat to higher elevations in the summer.

BIRDING

A portion of the eastern Mojave was censused for all vertebrate species in various years between 1917 and 1945. The report (Johnson *et al.* 1948) provides a valuable touchstone for contemporary birders who are interested in avifaunal changes in the last half century. For example, I have not been able to relocate the colony of Burrowing Owl reported two miles southwest of Kelso, but LeConte's Thrasher are still in Devil's Playground Wash (west of the mine). With few exceptions, the species found earlier in this century are still present today.

Along with desert specialties,

you will find many familiar species as well, especially in the New York and Providence Mountains. But take a close look. Many of the sedentary species (Scrub Jay, Plain Titmouse, Bushtit) are a different subspecies than on the coast (Grinnell and Miller, 1944). You'll find that the plumage is grayer than on the birds you're used to, and the vocalizations slightly different as well.

Birding is particularly easy in almost any habitat in the eastern Mojave; just pick a direction and start walking! In most areas, birds can be seen and heard from surprisingly long distances (Pinyon-Juniper Woodland being the exception). A productive strategy is to slowly cruise the roads with the windows of your vehicle down. When you see or hear something interesting, park, get out and head for it. It is also worthwhile to stand and listen, especially at locations where two or more habitats blend.

And don't let the heat scare you off. With the range of topographical relief available, it is easy to bird the desert floor in the early morning and climb to cooler elevations as the day warms up. The New York and Providence Mountains have some particularly nice spots for refuge on even the hottest days.

Some cautions are in order: you must respect property rights of the ranchers and miners; you must carry water and a first-aid kit (including snakebite kit) even if you think you are only going a few hundred feet from your vehicle; you must protect yourself from the sun (I always wear a hat and long-sleeved/legged garments); and you must make sure your vehicle is in good condition. Carry a compass and map if you're in hilly or forested terrain. Consult Kirst (1995) for more tips on desert travel and hiking.

The Auto Club map of San Bernardino county is excellent for birding purposes; the roads denoted "graded dirt" are satisfactory for passenger cars. Many of the other roads are passable by cars also, but you must be careful of sandy washes; it is easy to get bogged down, and help is a long way off.

WHERE DO I START?

One could start nearly anywhere, but here are a few spots that are easy to get to, generally "birdy," and fairly close together:

Black Canyon/Wild Horse Canyon Roads

The portion of these roads from a mile south of Cedar Canyon Road to the Mid-Hills Campground transitions from extensive areas of sagebrush to a dense stand of pinyon and juniper. The birds transition as well. Look for Bendire's Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow and wintering Sage Sparrow in the sagebrush "flats." As the terrain becomes more undulating and the juniper more abundant, Crissal Thrasher and Black-chinned Sparrow may be found. The dense area of pinyon and juniper provides habitat for Western Screech-Owl and Black-throated Gray Warbler.

Cedar Canyon

This is an area where many habitats blend. The low scrub around the wash is excellent for migrant embirds and warblers; the Joshua trees provide perches for Scott's Oriole and Northern Mockingbird; the brushier areas can produce Crissal Thrasher; the higher elevations are good for the usual pinyon-juniper birds, and Pinyon Jay can often be heard and sometimes seen. Be sure to explore the tributary canyons to the north and the "grassland" where the road leaves the canyon to the east.

Granite Pass

This area is good for both Bendire's and Crissal thrasher and other birds typical of higher-elevation Semi-succulent Scrub. Also check the mesquite and desert willow in the deep wash a mile and a quarter south of the pass for quail, woodpeckers and migrants.

Hole-in-the-Wall

Now an "improved" campground, the area is a mix of brush and Semi-succulent Scrub bordered by cliffs. Crissal Thrasher are often in the brush by the picnic area, Rock

Wren are on the cliffs, Violet-green Swallow overhead, Canyon Wren can be heard from the overlook or the "rings" trail, and Great Horned Owl and Common Poorwill (in spring) can be heard at night.

Providence Mountains State Recreation Area

The site of a small campground and Mitchell Caverns (accessible by guided tour), the Mary Beale Nature Trail east of the headquarters is excellent for birds favoring a mix of yucca, cholla and brush, and the Crystal Spring trail starting west of the headquarters gets you up into pinyon-juniper habitat. Keep an eye out for Crissal Thrasher around the campground.

April is an excellent month to be introduced to the East Mojave National Preserve. Temperatures are equable, migrants are passing through, and breeding birds are singing. I find midweek trips the best. Weekends find the campgrounds full. You can still camp in previously used spots away from campgrounds, however, and there are motels in Baker and a hotel in Nipton. Hope to see you out there. 🐦



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1st Place

BRIAN SMALL
Black-chinned Sparrow
Baldwin Lake, California

1996 PHOTO CONTEST

WINNERS

3rd Place

JOHN BRANUM
Female Anna's Hummingbird
Redondo Beach, California



2nd Place

JOHN BRANUM
White Pelican
Bolsa Chica, California



NEWS FROM THE BOOKSTORE

We can't tell you how much fun it is searching for new or out-of-print titles to tempt you. An updated flyer is available from the Bookstore of all new titles since the 1996 catalog was issued. Here are a few examples:

Birdwatching in Riverside, California; by Cin-Ty Lee, 1995, \$12.50 — Teaches basic birdwatching skills. Over 20 birdwatching spots described, including detailed maps. Description of all birds likely to be seen, including detailed bar graph showing when bird might be seen.

Introduced Birds of the World; the worldwide distribution and influence of birds introduced to new environments, by Long, 1981 (OP). \$59.95 — One copy only in mint condition.

Birder's Guide to New Hampshire; by Delorey, 1996. \$16.95 — Spiral bound, very comprehensive with seasonal bar graph checklist.

A Birder's Guide to the Fijian Islands; by Sargeant, 1995. \$10.95 — Detailed site guides with maps, complete checklist for all birds. 🐦

National Audubon Society



January 29, 1996

Fred Heath, President
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
West Hollywood, CA 90047

Dear Fred,

On behalf of the National Audubon Society's Los Angeles Education Office I would like to thank you for your generous grant of \$5,000 to support our "Water, Wetlands and Wildlife" education program at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area. We have just finished our second teacher workshop for the spring session, which was well received by the teachers. We have field trips scheduled throughout the month of February at the Sepulveda Basin and would like to invite you or any members of the Board to join us for an exciting morning. Please let me know if you are available.

I also want to extend our appreciation for your continued support of the Audubon Adventures program. The Los Angeles chapter is one of three throughout the country with the highest level of support for this important educational resource. Thanks to your efforts, over 6,700 schoolchildren take home an Audubon Adventures newsletter six times a year!

Again, thank you for all of your support and encouragement.

Best regards,

Melanie Ingalls
Project Director

MI:cs

Education Division - Los Angeles
200 Culver Boulevard, Playa del Rey, CA 90293
Telephone: (310) 574-2799 • Facsimile: (310) 574-2797

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The NABA-Xerces 4th of July Butterfly Count 1996

The 22nd annual NABA-Xerces 4th of July Butterfly Count will be held this summer. These counts are fun-filled but also track the butterfly populations of North America. Volunteers select a count area with a 15-mile diameter and conduct a one-day census of all butterflies sighted within that circle. These counts are usually held in the few weeks before or after the 4th of July.

The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) organizes the counts and publishes their annual reports. These reports provide im-

portant information about the geographical distributions and population sizes of the species counted. Comparisons of the results over the years monitor changes in butterfly populations and reveal effects of weather and habitat change on the different species. In some years the butterfly count shows dramatic changes in butterfly populations, while other years indicate little fluctuation in butterfly numbers. Either way, the butterfly counters are always curious about what next year's results will be!

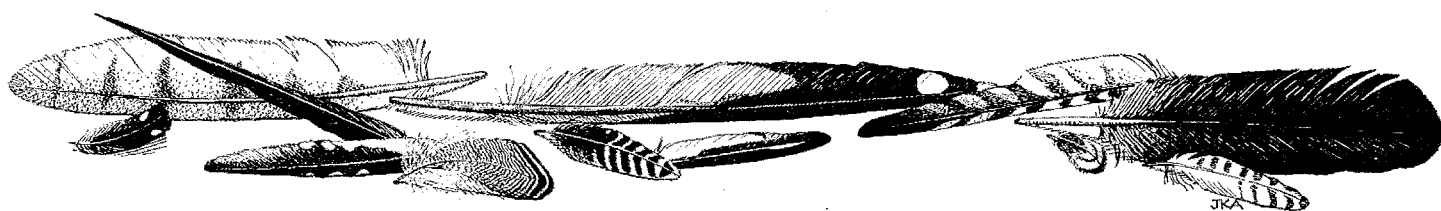
No matter how much or how

little butterfly watching you've done, the results of butterfly counting can be surprising and interesting. If a count already exists in your area, please join in for a day of fascinating butterfly counting. If there is no count in your area, you may start your own if you know how to identify the butterflies. Otherwise, inspire a nature center or butterfly club to start one for you!

For more information on the count program, counts in your area, how to conduct a count, and NABA in general, please write to:

NABA
4 Delaware Road
Morristown, NJ 07960

A self-addressed, stamped business envelope will expedite a response. 🐦



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

by Kimball L. Garrett

While hardly soon to be a major sci-fact movie coming to a theater near you, the invasion of the *Quiscalus* is a true-life phenomenon with ingredients that are intriguing, spectacular and a little bit scary. In this article I briefly review the history of the Great-tailed Grackle in southern California and suggest how we can refine our understanding of this astonishingly successful species and chart its spread.

If you look at any of the early works on the avifauna of California, from the middle of this century back, you'll find no mention of grackles of any sort. Grinnell and Miller recorded no grackles in the state, nor did Bob Pyle in his *Annotated Field List of the Birds of Southern California* published by the Los Angeles Audubon Society in 1953 (or Arnold Small's update of that work in 1961). It wasn't until 1964 that the first Great-tailed Grackle was recorded in California (near Imperial Dam on the lower Colorado River), and the species wasn't documented as a breeder in the state until 1969. Around this period, in November 1967, California's first Common Grackle also put in an appearance near El Cajon in San Diego County.

A significant increase in the numbers and range of Great-tailed Grackles occurred in California in the 1970s, although the species was still primarily restricted to the southeastern part of the state, with only a few "pioneers" noted to the north and west. This increase didn't occur in a vacuum, but was instead part of a major expansion through

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*



Photos by Kimball L. Garrett

left: Female Great-tailed Grackle in Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara Co., 24 December 1995



right: Male Great-tailed Grackle at Piute Ponds near Lancaster, Los Angeles Co., 2 May 1993

northwest Mexico and the southwestern United States. Arizona was colonized from the east and south in the late 1930s (see the classic *Birds of Arizona* by Phillips *et al.*, University of Arizona Press, 1964, for a chronicle of the history of grackles there), but it took nearly 30 years for the species to reach California. Arnold Small's *California Birds* (Ibis Publishing Co., 1994) details the expansion of the Great-tailed Grackle into the coastal regions and northern deserts through the 1980s and early 1990s.

Los Angeles County's first Great-tailed Grackle was part of the early push, a bird in San Pedro early in 1968. There was certainly no local grackle boom in the subsequent 20 years; only scattered individuals were recorded on the coastal slope and in the Antelope Valley. In the early 1990s, however, grackles began a minor assault on Los Angeles County. Nesting was documented around Legg Lake in Whittier Narrows in 1991, and the grackle flock there now numbers at least 50 birds. Grackles have nested in

increasing numbers around Lancaster (Piute Ponds) and Lake Palmdale in the 1990s, and in the past couple of years have also colonized El Dorado Park in Long Beach, Harbor Regional Park near San Pedro, the Sepulveda Basin in the San Fernando Valley, and Castaic Lagoon.

With the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas in full swing, we're in a position to refine our knowledge of the status of the Great-tailed Grackle in our area. The atlas is not intended to chart population changes over its five years of field work, though we will likely see a continued increase of grackles. Rather, the atlas will provide us with a "snapshot" of the distribution of grackles (and some 200 other species) at the end of this century, against which we can compare past and future distributional data. (By the way, the Atlas needs you, so join up if you haven't already.)

The spread of the Great-tailed Grackle into coastal California raises an interesting question of urban ecology. If you've traveled much in Mexico and the southwestern United States, you're aware that the grackle is a familiar and abundant urban species. Here in southern California the smaller but related Brewer's Blackbird is in many ways the grackle's equivalent in urban regions. Will a continued spread of grackles impact Brewer's Blackbirds? Or might the Brewer's Blackbirds slow or halt the grackle's march? Or, in the words of Rodney Kingbird, can they all just get along? We're in a great position to monitor the trends that will answer such questions!

These musings are dedicated to two prolific gentlemen who have given us much food for thought about grackles and other subjects, and, sadly, who left us recently: Allan Phillips and Jack Smith. 🐦

1996 Golden Trout Natural History Workshop

Located at the 10,000-foot level in the southern Sierra Nevada near Mount Whitney, Golden Trout Natural History Workshops provide a special educational adventure to individuals and families. These six-day workshops have been organized by a nonprofit overseer since 1974 and provide professionally led tours of Sierran natural history. The Golden Trout Camp educational facility serves as each workshop's high altitude classroom base camp, and 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 1996 sessions are offered beginning June 30 through July 20; enrollment is limited. This is California's most unique outdoor workshop! To receive a brochure, write to:

Golden Trout
Natural History
workshop, Inc., Attn:
Cindi McKernan, 1230

Friar Lane, Redlands, CA 92373
(909/798-3060). 🐦

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CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Another Sepulveda column. How come? Well, first of all, the present writer lives a paltry five miles from the Wildlife Reserve and finds the greenery, the lake, the mountains and the open sky a marvelous refuge from the monotony of the city. Second, this wildlife area in the Sepulveda Basin is the only official, deliberately planned sanctuary in metropolitan Los Angeles. Carved out of an agricultural field, it is a spectacular success. It gets tender loving care from the city Recreation and Parks Department and will be there forever. It can only improve with age.

Consider: What are the opportunities for accessible birding in this city? If you live on the south side of the Santa Monica Mountains you have Griffith Park, Playa del Rey, Malibu lagoon and not much else. Even in the San Fernando Valley the pickin's are nothing to brag about: O'Melveny Park, Hansen Dam, Placerita Canyon and the Sylmar parks. A fair number of birders come to the Basin from the west side regularly because it offers the possibility of good birding in a reasonably natural setting. In a good winter there is a fine variety of ducks and a couple of hundred Canada Geese with an occasional sprinkling of Snow Geese or Greater White-fronted Geese. Over the last year, some of the choicer species have been Least Bittern, Burrowing Owl, White-faced Ibis, Franklin's Gull, Blue-winged Teal, Swainson's Hawk, Yellow-breasted Chat, American Bittern, Peregrine Falcon, White Pelican and Brown Pelican. The spectacular Blue Grosbeak nests every year and never

fails to astonish. An unusual handful of African birds popped up: Yellow-crowned Bishop, nesting Red Bishops with young and an Abdim's Stork. The bishops must have been escaped birds, but the stork's origin is a mystery.

In 1971, the Sylmar earthquake struck the northwest Valley, with substantial loss of lives and property. Van Norman Dam, an earthen dam and part of the terminus of the Los Angeles aqueduct, showed signs of cracking. The 60-acre field that is now the northern Wildlife Reserve contains a relatively impervious clay which was dug up to repair the dam. A small shallow cavity called a borrow pit remained where the clay was extracted and the pit was promptly forgotten in this unused weedy meadow. Irrigation of an adjacent corn field and rain in winter filled the pit with 4 to 12 inches of water that seemed to be perfect for shorebirds and waders, and for several years in the mid-'70s it was a birder's paradise: Baird's, Solitary and Pectoral sandpipers, Red-necked and Wilson's phalaropes, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Semipalmated and Black-bellied plovers, Bobolink, Palm Warbler. Plus many ducks, stilts, egrets and the more common sandpipers and sparrows. One year, out of a clear sky, a pair of Sandhill Cranes floated into an adjoining field to the delight of the few lucky birders who saw them.

To the original 48 acres south of Burbank Blvd. set aside as Wildlife Reserve, 60 acres were added to the north and an 11-acre lake was built there with a grant from the state. The lake was dedicated in 1990 and later received reclaimed water from

the Tillman plant in the Basin. Because of concerns with algae growth and mosquito proliferation in the hot summer months, the Regional Water Quality Control Board ruled that the lake should be drained to avoid these problems and be refilled in the fall. This would have prevented the development over the years of a continuous, living ecosystem. Excellent monitoring of the water quality by Rec and Parks personnel convinced the Water Board that a year-round lake would succeed. As it has. There is a constant flow of water into the lake which eventually empties into the Los Angeles River. This maintains clean water with high oxygen content that supports healthy fish, a large winter Double-crested Cormorant population and an occasional Kingfisher and Osprey.

After the Corps gave up development of the southern portion of the Reserve ten years ago, native trees and shrubs that had been planted grew well but were engulfed by an almost impenetrable jungle of weedy vegetation. Habitat north of Burbank Blvd. is a different story. Since the lake is its most prominent feature, much of the interest centers around waterfowl and their requirements. Reeds and cattails were planted and provide security and nesting places for the Red-winged Blackbirds, the Soras and the Pied-billed Grebes. The one-acre island offers a safe resting area for all aquatic birds and is widely used. A visit by boat to the island for the Breeding Bird Atlas discovered eight Mallard nests and one Song Sparrow nest on the ground with five handsome eggs.

Many fast-growing cottonwoods have been planted in several places: close to the lake, on the island and along Haskell Creek which is the western border of the northern area. The creek harbors a successful riparian habitat of volunteer plants which serves Green Herons, an occasional Black-crowned Night-Heron, Snowy and Great egrets, Common Snipe and a few adventurous ducks.

Unfortunately, the shorebird bonanza of the '70s is missing. Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, occasional Long-billed Dowitchers and Spotted Sandpipers forage around the lake, but mudflats are missing. On request, Rec and Parks has obligingly cleared a few areas

along the shores of the lake and the island, but water-loving plants grow in so fast that productive mudflats have no chance to develop. Perhaps a brilliant idea is lurking in the shadows and will emerge to solve this problem.

Other habitat improvements are in the offing. Available money from Proposition A bond initiative and the Corps of Engineers will see the expansion of the Wildlife Reserve to include the two sod farms west of the present boundary of the northern section. Grassland and oak savannah are planned for much of this new reserve, which may attract raptors and chaparral birds. "Hummingbird Hill" on the north slope of Burbank Blvd. has recently planted

oaks and walnut trees as well as native shrubs and flowering plants that will charm the feisty hummers.

The Sepulveda Wildlife Reserve, a bare few years in the making, is already a pleasant, attractive place for the general strolling public in search of a respite from traffic, concrete and the jangle of commerce.

For birders it is an accessible, productive space — not a hot spot, but a spot with great potential. The first year of the Breeding Bird Atlas turned up 23 "confirmed" nesting birds for the Basin, including an unexpected Great Blue heronry in trees on one of the golf course lakes. Different habitats may entice new species. Onward and upward! ➤

Extension Granted on Deadline For Otter License Plate Sales

The Department of Motor Vehicles has granted a one-year extension on the deadline for the sales of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary sea otter license plates, giving the campaign until December 31, 1996, to collect the necessary 5,000 paid applications.

The Sanctuary plate, with its fetching image of a sea otter against the cliffs of Big Sur, is one of five environmental license plates to be approved by the state legislature. Only one of the five, Yosemite, has

reached its sales goal in one year.

Mike Wallace, spokesman for the license plate campaign, said the Sanctuary plate has generated interest from nearly all parts of the state, with two-thirds of sales to date coming from outside the Monterey Bay area, a far higher figure than originally expected.

Sanctuary license plates cost \$50 above normal registration fees the first year and \$40 each renewal year. Personalized plates of six characters or less are \$90 for the first year and \$65 each renewal

year. Proceeds will be divided between the Sanctuary, for its education and public information programs, and the California Environmental License Plate Fund.

Applications for the license plate are available at all DMV offices, at CSAA offices throughout Northern California, and at Southern California Auto Club offices. They may also be ordered by calling AMBAG (the agency overseeing the campaign) at 408/883-3750, by faxing a request to 408/883-3755, or by writing AMBAG at P.O. Box 809, Marina, CA 93933-0809. An application can also be downloaded from the license plate's Internet web page at <http://www.montereynet.com/otterplate.html>. ➤



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Fish & Fowl

a show of nature art

including works by

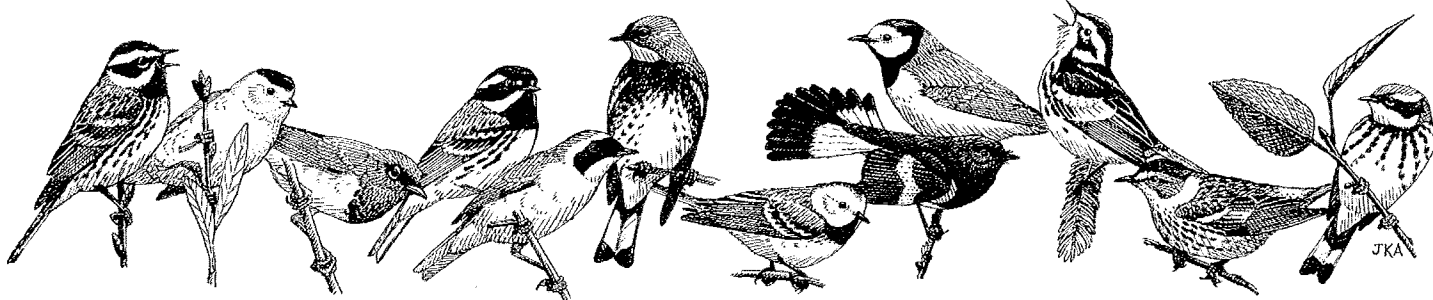
Jonathan Alderfer

Antelope Valley College

March 27–April 24

contact Charles Hood for details

805/273-5644



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodtkin

April is the most pleasant and birdy month in southern California. One of my favorite areas this time of year is the Walker Ranch section of Placerita State and County Park in Santa Clarita. Sometime between the second and third weeks of the month migration reaches its peak and the ceanothus-scented canyon is full of birds. The oaks in the campground can hold up to eight different species of warbler, and the calls of Mountain Quail fill the air. Walk up the flower-paved canyon along the creek, past the entrance to the trail to the waterfall, scanning the hillsides for the singing Lazuli Buntings and Ash-throated Flycatchers. The easy part of the canyon ends in a grove of alder, a favored spot for Pacific-slope and Hammond's flycatchers. Beyond the waterfall trail entrance it is doubtful you will meet any other hikers — and a morning spent here will reawaken and replenish your spirit and perhaps remind you why you started birding in the first place. One word of warning: Watch out for the poison oak! It is particularly abundant here.

While many of the wintering vagrants mentioned in last month's column remained, sightings of new birds were typically slow for this time of year. One exception was a **wagtail**, finally identified as **Black-backed**, seen at this winter's "hot spot" — Doheny Beach State Park. This bird, first thought to have been a White Wagtail (but newly molted black back feathers suggest otherwise), was found by Tim Ryan on 25 January

and has shown up every morning and evening to date (21 February). It spends its days feeding well upstream in the San Juan Creek channel.

A female **Tufted Duck** was found at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds near Ventura on 10 February (Steve Tucker), and an **American Oystercatcher** was at Royal Palms Beach on 24 January (Martin Byhower).

A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** — a bird that is showing up more and more in North America — was found at the Brawley garbage dump on 22 January (Paul Lehman). Two **Ruddy Ground-Doves** were still at Furnace Creek Ranch on 19 February (Gerard Phillips). A **Vaux's Swift** was at Westlake, Ventura County, on 30 January (Mark Bolinger), and the season's first **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** report comes from Arroyo Seco on 19 February (Kathleen McPeck and Bill Principe).

A **Grace's Warbler** at Chilao, undoubtedly the same bird found there by Tim Kastell last October, *American Oystercatcher*

was rediscovered on 11 February (Tom Newhouse). An immature male **American Redstart** was seen in downtown Los Angeles near the courthouse on 6 February by a birder serving on jury duty (Bob Neuwirth).

A **Black-headed Grosbeak** was at a feeder in Agoura on 17 February (Robert Weissler), and another was seen at another feeder on the same day in Pasadena. A **"Gray-headed" Junco** was seen in La Cañada 17-19 February (Gail Hightower). Four **McCown's Longspurs** were seen in a field near the south end of the Salton Sea on 19 February (Ed Stonik).

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:

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Or call **Jon Fisher** — 818/544-5009



Continued from page 12

mation on Saturday 9:30 A.M. meeting place near Warner Springs, group camp location for Saturday, and the trip in general, send \$9 per person with SASE to LAAS. Anticipate a \$5-10 access fee. A few dollars will be collected to cover LAAS-reserved campsite fees. Limited to 18 participants.

Saturday, April 27 — Antelope Valley. Leader **Fred Heath**. See April 13 write-up for details.

Sunday, April 28 — Latigo Canyon. Leader **Mark Wimer** will be atlas-ing breeding bird evidence for early residents such as Cooper's Hawk, Nutall's Woodpecker and Costa's Hummingbird in riparian and scrub habitats of the Santa Monica Mountains. Migrants should be thick. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the pullout on Latigo Canyon Rd. and PCH, about 4 miles NW of Pepperdine University. Bring lunch.


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.

 **Saturday, May 4 — Three-island, 12-hour trip on Island Packer's *M.V. Vanguard* out of Ventura Harbor to Anacapa Island, Santa Rosa Island and through the Santa Rosa Passage to Santa Cruz Island. \$65.**

Sunday, May 5 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See April 7 write-up for details.

Saturday, May 11 — Santa Anita Canyon. Leader **Mary Carmona**. Take the 210 Fwy toward Arcadia. Exit at Santa Anita Ave. N to the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at the trailhead at the bottom of the lot. Four mile round-trip moderately strenuous walk through oak and chaparral canyons. Good selection of breeding and migrating birds including warblers, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Band-tailed Pigeon, three hummers and dipper possible. Bring a lunch.

Sunday, May 12 — Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See April 14 write-up for details.


 **Saturday, May 18 — 12-hour trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Bank. \$40.**


Saturday, May 18 — Mojave Narrows Lizards. Los Angeles Zoo herpetologist and LAAS member **Harvey Fischer** will lead. We will briefly bird the lake, marsh, fields and cottonwoods of Mojave Narrows until it warms up, then look for lively lizards in the rocky and sandy desert nearby. Meet at 6:30 A.M. in the L.A. Zoo parking lot at the turtle sign, or meet at 8:00 A.M. in the parking lot of the Mojave Narrows boathouse. Take Hwy 15 toward Victorville, and take the Bear Valley cutoff E for about 4 miles. The entrance road into the park will be on the left. Anticipate heat, hunger and rock-hopping. Limited sign-up by phone with LAAS.


Sunday, May 19 — Antelope Valley. Leader **Fred Heath**. See April 13 write-up for details.

Saturday and Sunday, June 15 and 16 — Yosemite. Leader **Louis Tucker** will concentrate on local specialty birds. Trip ends Sunday afternoon in Owens Valley. Possible snow on ground, in air. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in the Mariposa Grove parking lot just beyond Yosemite's south entrance. Reserve with SASE and \$20 to LAAS to receive flyer. Limited to 14 participants by park rules. We plan to reserve two free campsites for Saturday night at Crane Flat (to accommodate 12 participants). We may need a participant to reserve a third campsite (call LAAS to confirm). Yosemite campsites are booked through Destinet (800/436-7275). Important facts in May *Tanager* listing.

Friday through Monday, June 28 through July 1 — Southern Sierras Weekend with Bob Barnes. Likely: 5 empids, 2 buntings, 4 grosbeaks, Northern Goshawk, Pinyon Jay, 8 warblers, 14 sparrows, 3 goldfinches, 9 woodpeckers, Brown-crested Flycatcher and lots more. Pileated Woodpecker and most owls possible. Limited to 20 participants. For information flyer, reserve with SASE to LAAS. Fee \$11 for each day attended (\$44 for 4 days). Reserve rooms early.

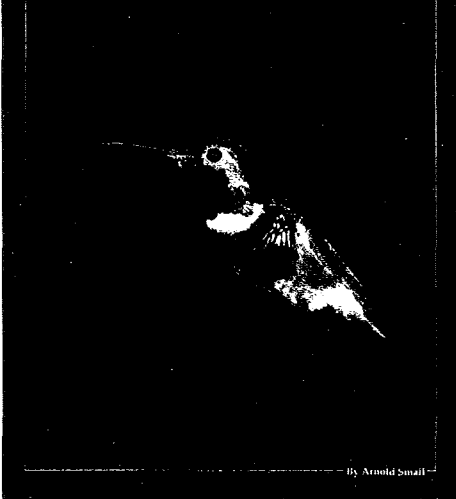
 **Saturday, September 14 — 12-hour trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San Pedro to Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Bank. \$40.**

 **Sunday, October 6 — Three-island, 12-hour trip on Island Packer's *M.V. Vanguard* out of Ventura Harbor to Anacapa Island, Santa Rosa Island and through the Santa Rosa Passage to Santa Cruz Island. \$65.**

 **Saturday, November 16 — 8-hour trip on the *R.V. Vantuna* out of San Pedro to the Palos Verdes Escarpment and Redondo Canyon. \$25. ➤**

California Birds

Their Status and Distribution



EVENING MEETING

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

April 9, 1996 Arnold Small Birds of California Over the Last 50 Years

Photographer and author Arnold Small will present a superbly illustrated discussion of the changes in bird populations, status and increase of rarities. Join us for this birding tour from the depths of Death Valley to the heights of the Sierras, from the deserts to the ocean. Arnold will be available to autograph his most recent book, *California Birds: Their Status and Distribution*.

May 14, 1996 California Gnatcatcher — History and Conservation Issues

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, April 7 — 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 its intersection with Ventura Blvd. in the Valley, take Topanga Canyon Blvd.

7 miles S then turn E (uphill) on Entrada Rd. (1 mile N of Topanga Village). Follow the signs and turn left into the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$5 parking fee.

Saturday, April 13 — Antelope Valley. Enjoy our birds while supporting local efforts to understand them better by searching out evidence of breeding birds for the L.A. Breeding Bird Atlas with **Fred Heath**, as he stops to watch the migrants and to smell the plentiful wildflowers along the way. Finish up at the limited access Piute

Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at LaMont-Odett Overlook. Take Hwy 14 N past the Pearblossom Hwy turnoff. The overlook is on the right just as Lake Palmdale comes into view. Bring lunch.

Sunday, April 14 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park. Join ranger **Ray Jillson** at 8:00 A.M. to view resident raptors, waterbirds and songbirds. Cardinals resident. 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 the park.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
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Saturday and Sunday, April 20 and 21 — San Diego Mountains. Leader **Larry Allen** will look for Zone-tailed Hawks by midmorning Saturday at Hot Springs Mountain and for Saw-whet and other owls early Sunday morning (and possibly Saturday evening) in the Cuyamaca Mountains. He will also look for possible Harris' Hawk in Anza Borrego if time permits. For infor-

Continued on page 11