

WESTERN TANAGER



Volume 62 Number 8 May 1996

Los Angeles Audubon Society

C A T B I R D D E S E R T

by Cal Yorke

A loose speaker wire is fragmenting a medley of Eagles' hits... "STANDIN' ON... GIRL... AT ME... EEEAAZAY..." Wendy abruptly switches off the radio. She seems determined to survive. She's doing all the driving; I'm the navigator-scanner-commentator. Beneath the shadow of her navy blue cap, Wendy's cheeks are flushed and raised by a painful wince. Her dark brown eyes are fixed intently on the road; her lips resolutely pouted. For a moment the wind entertains us with a dry whistle through a broken window vent.

"I hope we see a good bird today!" Wendy exclaims, soprano *con anima*.

I nod with approval. Our agenda is coming into focus: mixed-up birds in a messed-up desert. Today is October 1, 1995. The great landbird migrations through southern California are un-

der way. A few eastern vagrants might be among the regular migrants using the desert oases. We could get lucky.

Northeast of the town of Mojave, we're travelling parallel to the Tehachapi Mountains, an extension of the southern Sierra Nevada. Beyond the advertisements for ski equipment and resorts are creosote bushes growing in circles of ten to forty feet in diameter.

Creosote bushes in "ring" configurations are clones, descendants from much older individuals whose semi-fossilized roots remain buried in the center of the ring. Some of the roots have yielded radiocarbon dates of about 10,000 years. So creosote bush rings are "living fossils" thousands of years older than the most ancient bristlecone pine, and are believed to have begun growing when the Mojave Desert was originally formed. It seems there is



an educational billboard missing. But who would dare slow down to read it?

"It's so beautiful out here!"

The innocent suggestion of Wendy's words rocks me out of a highway stupor. The Mojave Desert is under siege. Accept the inevitable: wind farms, mountain-munching gravel mines, dirt bikes, roadway litter and pretentious signs proclaiming: "California Desert Conservation Area."

"It is, but things have changed, you know... nearly everything but the heat and wind."

I lean back and try to enjoy the scenery. Memories rush to the forefront, discoloring surrealistic blends of lavender, pink and rusty-red, capping an archipelago of volcanic buttes trailing off to the east.

When I first visited the Mojave Desert in 1972, there was astonishing biodiversity, often within city limits. Tortoises, leopard lizards and Le Conte's Thrashers were common. Even a few Mojave ground squirrels popped up in what is now suburban Palmdale. After dark, kit foxes, desert cottontails, kangaroo rats and glossy snakes loitered on backstreets. Now I'm sometimes surprised by my own delight with salvageable roadkill.

Veering to the right onto Twenty Mule Team Parkway, we drive past a sign identifying a desert tortoise reserve. A large portion of the reserve includes an abandoned development with unpaved streets and assassinated household appliances. Thanks to the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, the desert tortoise and its almost-natural habitat are fully protected. The mules, with their payload of borax from Death Valley, are gone. The historical highway cuts a zigzag path through a vast rolling plain of creosote bush scrub.

On the roadside ahead about a dozen birders are peering into a dry wash. A man and a boy are playing catch behind the crowd as we cruise by. Our car suddenly drops off the edge of the pavement and onto a narrow, sandy shoulder. We skid to a stop. A terrified side-blotched lizard

ard bolts for cover. Across the road, several sport-utility vehicles are lined up on a short access road leading to a big water tank.

"Is this okay?" Wendy asks, caught up in the excitement.

"A little more forward... there, that's fine. Let's see what they've got."

We approach slowly and with considerable caution — not so much to avoid startling the bird, but to avoid aggravating the birders. Remember, some people MUST GET



Herb Clarke
Desert Side-Blotched Lizard

THAT BIRD!... AND YOU ARE MANGLED RABBIT MEAT ON THE ROADWAY IF YOU COME BETWEEN THEM AND THEIR BIRD!

I wade through knee-high shrubs and step down into the wash, inadvertently crushing a beer can. Heads turn toward the source of the crackling noise my boot has made. My binocular serves as a convenient disguise.

There's a dark bird on the ground moving quickly in the shadows... patience, it's coming into view... a *Gray Catbird*. Incredible. Wendy has the bird in full view at close range, almost too close for the focal range of her binocular. Cameras are clicking, a camcorder light is on and a hush comes over the crowd. Wendy turns toward me and silently forms the words "I SAW IT... IT'S HERE!"

"OKAY, GREAT!" I reply, using the appropriate facial contortions. Preoccupied with foraging, the catbird seems to have tuned us out. It probably wouldn't mind if we used a megaphone.

Expensive scopes and cameras (one lens looks like it belongs on Mt. Palomar) attached to cumbersome tripods are toted away. I move closer to observe the bird's behavior. It is busy refuelling — dashing between shrubs, snatching an insect here, gleaning dried seeds there. Using its thin black bill like forceps, the bird pinches and shakes a squirming, naked caterpillar, gulps it down, then leaps upward to pluck a seed pod from a cluster of dried *Eriastrum* flowers. Nonstop action. The catbird dances in and out of a mosaic of glaring sand and sparse shadow. Before I can bring it into focus, the bird disappears behind the dark green foliage of a compact little burrobush. Out it comes again, hesitating, picturesquely, poised alongside a brilliant yellow inflorescence of autumn vinegar weed. The bird forages relentlessly, seemingly haphazardly, for whatever it may find, as if the roadside market will soon be closed.

Gray Catbirds are supposed to fly south and/or southeast to reach their wintering quarters in the southeastern U.S., Mexico and Central America. This particular bird, wherever it had come from (e.g., northern Oregon, Iowa, New Brunswick), had evidently been flying south by southwest longer than necessary. Continuing in that direction, the bird might end up somewhere along the coast of southern California — where the species is rare, but almost annual in occurrence.

After lunch we return to pay our last respects to the vagrant catbird. It has moved to the nearby water tank and cinder block building. The temperature is near 90°. Wendy is spending a few minutes observing the catbird, several House Finches and a Sage Sparrow drinking from a puddle beneath an evaporative cooler. Meanwhile, I've returned to the site where we had encountered the bird earlier. I'm inspecting the roadside microhabitat the catbird had selected. I note the most obvious features, in no particular order:

Brome grass (common); rabbit-brush (common); tumble mustard

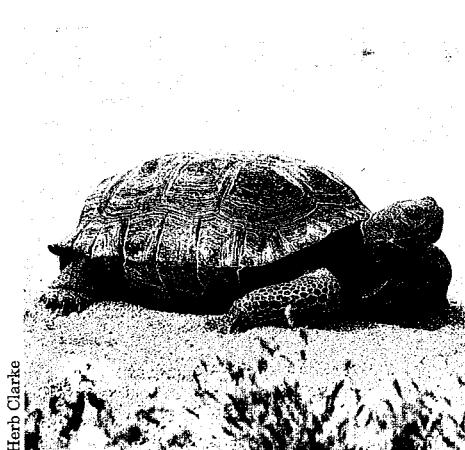
(common); burrobush (common); *Eriastrum* (common); autumn vinegar weed (common); peachthorn (uncommon); cottonthorn (uncommon); Cooper goldenbush (uncommon); a white-tailed antelope ground squirrel; a side-blotched lizard; legions of desert harvester ants; two white butterflies; a 10 oz. Nestle's Quik chocolate milk carton; a paper plate; a Natural Light beer can; two Marlboro filter cigarette butts; a 12 oz. Fast Break, Food & More paper cup; half of an unlabeled cassette cartridge; a Pro Circuit Racing bumper sticker; two broken reflectors; a No. 12 paper cup; three Budweiser bottles (two broken); a Crunch Natural Light Bar wrapper; an 8 ml. Reckless Rainbow Pop Ups popsicle wrapper; a small hubcap with three .38 caliber bullet holes; ATV tracks (common); running shoe and boot tracks (common); sand (very common).

Clearly, field biology has fallen on hard times. Inedible items, labeled or not, might be wholly ignored by a catbird (or anyone with minimal dignity). But who knows what a catbird (or any organism) actually perceives? Perhaps a catbird running low on fuel in the desert responds to roadways, human dwellings or trash, which the bird had imprinted on in its natal suburban habitat (e.g., Fayetteville, Arkansas). Or a migrant catbird could be attracted to the sight and sound of other birds, as a lone birder is to a group of people with binoculars... *Mother Theresa on a Kawasaki!* What if a homeless catbird associates humans with salvation?!

We're going home. An empty Gatorade bottle rolls around on the floor behind my seat with nauseating regularity. TINK... TINK... THUNK... TINK... TINK. My thoughts bounce back and forth in a cost/benefit analysis of gas-guzzling automobiles, CFC air conditioners, waste water treatment ponds, and a day of birding in the desert. Thus far we had encountered, in addition to the vagrant catbird, about 50 species of bird — a modest tally. This had been possible because of a

car, exotic vegetation and recycled water used in local parks. There had been an unavoidably artificial aspect to our birding adventure. My head is spinning with an unbalanced load of guilt. I'm afraid oasis birding is losing its appeal; the sport flies in the face of preservation ethics. Wait! That can't be the whole story!

We coast to a stop at the end of the Avenue I offramp in Lancaster. I'm regaining my senses. Wendy shifts into first gear, smiles and



Desert Tortoise

says, "I never knew there were so many good places for birds in the desert! Do you think we will go birding out there again?"

"Definitely," I reply, somewhat mechanically.

I am still searching for a pattern, or merely a unifying thread of understanding. Sure, life birds are always welcomed. And Wendy seems pleased. But there is more to this game, indeed more than a predictable alignment of variables: fall migration, vagrant landbirds, desert oases, weekend birders.

There is a big, complex, chaotic story here, one that began about four billion years ago, but until relatively recently had nobody to tell it. Now people are telling the story, as well as participating in it. As birders, we have the opportunity to observe how nature tries to get along with us, if it's given half a chance. Today we saw how a catbird made use of a modified desert. Although this fact is certainly not justification for converting more pris-

tine desert into "catbird desert," we can at least come to appreciate the increasingly dominant role we are playing in the biosphere.

From the window of my study, dusk in the western Antelope Valley is pretty much the same as yesterday and the day before: block-and-mortar walls, ditches on tumbleweed, an overturned shopping cart, a leafless elm flagged with a plastic grocery bag, and half-built luxury homes inhabited by ravens and Barn Owls. In a few more minutes the mundane scene is painted burnt orange; in a few blinks of the eye, shadows in magenta, and suddenly there are recognizable forms again, jaundiced beneath street lights. Returning to the task at hand, I make the last entry in my journal: No. 53, House Sparrow, about 50, Galileo Park; loose, noisy flocks in ornamental shrubbery along the road by the stables. Has anything escaped notice?

Yes! I can picture it... fluttering in the shadows... 40 raven-miles northeast of Lancaster... a diminutive, yet extraordinary creature has come to the desert from a distant land. The bird's pulse quickens with the onset of darkness. Hopping into the open, it pivots indecisively and pauses for a moment, suggesting taxidermic perfection. It has a glazed, upward stare, as if asking the heavens for guidance. It listens intently for the cries of friends, fellow fugitives from northern skies. It hears instead unfamiliar, plaintive chirps — a flock of Horned Larks commuting to their roost. A beer can is flung from a passing car, "KLONK... KLAKITTY, KLAK."

The catbird's jet black eyes nictate with disbelief. Its flight to the wintering grounds has been hijacked by some sort of mutant positing as migratory instinct. Time is running out; rescue seems unlikely. Fall constellations burn into its retina. Instantly, optic nerves relay impulses to a defective orientation/navigation template in the brain. There's a match. Course heading: south by southwest. WHAT? Repeat: SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST. Take it easy, Catbird! ↗



JKA

CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

There was pain and anguish for most of us as we watched Gingrich's gangsters salivate with anticipation at the demise of the Endangered Species Act. The 70-plus militant freshmen, joined by their ultra-conservative mentors in the House, were gung-ho to demolish the environmental progress of the last 25 years. Scarcely had the new majority been seated in January 1995 than their bills — many written by industry's lobbyists — were churning through committees. Here's a sample of their wish list:

- Exempting oil refineries from the Clean Air Act
- Cutting EPA's funding drastically for enforcement and Superfund toxic cleanup
- Reducing land acquisition funds for national parks and wilderness areas by 76%
- Eliminating the ban on imported tuna caught in nets that kill dolphins
- Reauthorizing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that removes habitat protection and puts a moratorium on any further listings of plants and animals.

The war on the environment is across the board, but the assault upon the ESA seems to be the center of the blitzkrieg. The audacity of the Act in covering all land in the nation, private and public, enrages real estate, mining and agribusiness interests and the Wise Use grassroots groups they sponsor. The Act, passed in 1973 and signed by Richard Nixon, was publicly unchallenged by Ronald Reagan or George Bush. The "mandate" for change of the 1994 election is the

license the majority has claimed for an unlimited attack on all aspects of environmental protection.

Now the foxes are truly in charge of the henhouse. The Alaskan delegation heads the natural resources committees in both House and Senate and sends up bills to open the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. Don Young (R-AK), House Resources Committee chairman (when he got the job he dropped the "Natural"), and California's Richard Pombo devised what opponents call "The Endangered Species Extinction Bill" that would disembowel the ESA. Pombo has raised a prodigious \$800,000 from interested parties that would profit if the Act did not apply to endangered species on private property. Pombo went barnstorming around the country with the bill, holding phony hearings in obscure towns, listening to anti-ESA stories and excluding scientific experts from testifying for the Act.

No less than Tom DeLay, the House majority whip who routinely calls the EPA "the Gestapo," vigorously supports a bill that would make the cleanup of toxics in the Great Lakes voluntary, cuts the EPA's runoff pollution program nationwide and redefines wetlands so that up to 80% of them will be unprotected. The language and ideas generated by strong feelings about environmental legislation is significant. Senator Slade Gorton of Washington proposed that endangered species should be moved from the wild to zoos "as a way to preserve animals without blocking economic development." Idaho Senator Larry Craig says that eastern city

folks should mind their own business and let us westerners solve the problem: "The only endangered species in New York City is probably a free white human being." At a Fresno meeting on the ESA an unidentified woman is supposed to have said that if the animals can't make it anymore "then God is calling them home." When the *Anchorage Daily News* opposed accelerated logging in the Tongass National Forest, our friend Don Young called the editors "a bunch of Communists." And last of all, *Congressman Sonny Bono*, stand-up comedian, said we should take all endangered species, "give them all a designated area and then blow it up."

For a long time things have been looking pretty bleak. Picking up a newspaper became a study in anxiety: What environmental atrocity is in store for us today? Perhaps all is not lost. For some time there have been indications that a change is taking place in the intensity of the discussion. The headlong drive to wipe out the last decades of progress has lost some of its steam. The intransigence of the Republican freshmen that stalled government twice over the budget seems to have faded and the shrillness of the attacks on environmental regulations is somewhat muted. Is a backlash beginning to form? Are the people catching on to what's happening? George Miller (D-CA), former chairman of the House *Natural Resources Committee*, said recently, "This is the most systematic and comprehensive assault on the environment and the environmental laws of this nation in the history of the country." Polls taken

for the Republicans reveal that the public prefers environmental protection over cutting regulations by 2 to 1, and 72% say that the environment is so important it should be protected "regardless of cost."

Responding to evidence that they may not be fooling people, the upper echelons are sending down advice to the troops. Adopt a highway with a sign advertising your name in big letters. Plant some trees — but only if you can get a photo op from the media. Start a recycling drive and get some local environmentalists to give you Brownie points — if possible. Everybody's hatchetman, Tom DeLay, touts the party's achievements: strengthening the Clean Water Act, improving the ESA, helping the EPA achieve "common sense, scientific, financially sound solutions," all with "strong grassroots support." All bull ----. The barrage against the environment has been so violent that moderate Republicans who are Teddy Roosevelt preservationists are outraged. In the House as many as 62 Republicans have voted against blatantly anti-environmental measures; in some cases there were enough votes to prevent a veto override.

The cold fact is that this is an election year and the word is out to soft-pedal the hard stuff for now. Though the Contract With America says little about the environment directly, the demonization of big government and "regulations" sets the tone for anti-environmentalism. Newt Gingrich is still calling the shots and the Contract is under wraps for the moment, waiting for a friendly president and a more right-wing Congress. If the people hold fast to their long record of support for clean air and water, their love for mountains and wildness, plants and animals, they may yet save the world. 

NEWS FROM THE BOOKSTORE

Chickadees, Tits, Nuthatches & Treecreepers; covering all 110 species, 36 color plates, 115 maps, 392pp; by Harrap, 1995. \$50.

Indonesia Birdsong; 48+ species recorded in Sulawesi, Halmahera, Java and Sumatra. Privately produced, very useful; by Gibbs, 1990. \$14.95.

Key Guide to Australian Wildflowers; 600 species simply identified, illustrated beautifully in color; by Cronin, 1995. \$34.95.

Wallacea: A Site Guide for Birdwatchers; 16 site reports with maps and birdlist, plus short mammal list, 80pp; by Gibbs, 1993. \$25.

Searching for Butterflies in Southern California; 210pp; by Dameron, 1996. \$16.95.

Birdwatchers' Guide to Turkey; includes checklist and maps, 122pp; by Green, 1995. \$24.95.

Birdwatching in Madagascar with Reunion, Maruitius and Seychelles; itinerary, locality information and birdlist, 63pp; by Jensen, 1994. \$16.95.

Birders' Guide to Gulf of Guinea Islands: Sao Tome and Principe; where to find all 25 endemics, maps and checklist; by Sargeant, 1992. \$19.95.

Birder's Guide to Travel in Madagascar; 22 locations, maps, list of endemics and difficult species; by Gardner, 1992. \$24.95.

Birder's Guide to the Philippines; lists and maps for all major sites plus key identification of Philippine swiftlets, 44pp; by Sargeant, 1992. \$21.95.

Birding Southern India and the Andamans; a guide to selected sites with maps and annotated bird checklist, 71pp; by Curson, 1991. \$21.95, \$19.95.

Wildflowers of the Santa Monica Mountains; 2nd ed.; by McAuley 1996. \$19.95.

Wild Thailand; spectacular photos of wildlife and scenery, text and maps included; by Cubitt, 1996. \$39.95.

WESTERN TANAGER

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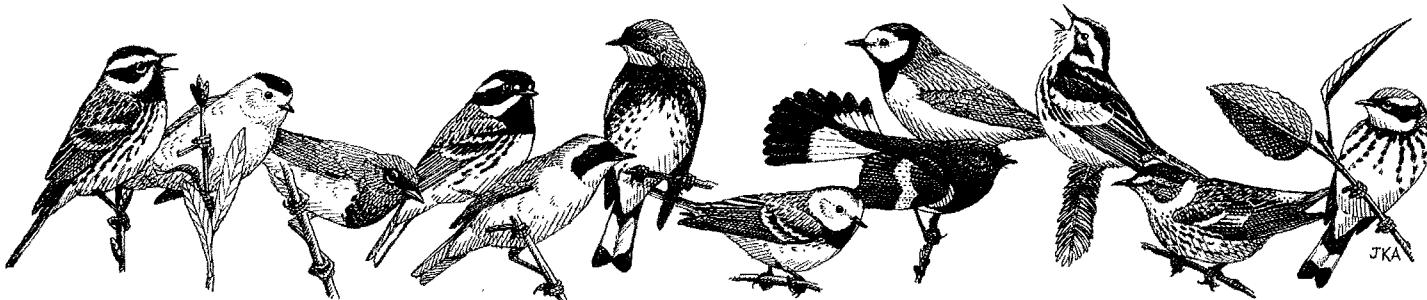
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BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Hank Brodkin

May is the season for spring vagrants, the time of year to expect out-of-range, apparently lost, spring migrants. While these could show up anywhere, there are certain favored "vagrant traps" that seem to concentrate these wanderers. Probably a combination of location, water and food make these areas especially attractive. Usually they are oases, either actual desert oases — such as Big Morongo Reserve in San Bernardino County or Butterbrett Springs in eastern Kern County — or manmade oases in the manmade deserts of cities. Harbor Park in San Pedro and Hansen Dam near Lakeview Terrace are two that come to mind.

Quite a number of good spots can be found in Hank Childs' *Where Birders Go in Southern California*, published by LAAS and available in the Bookstore. And the adventuresome among you might find your own good spot that will become tomorrow's place to look for these elusive birds.

The AOU recently published the Fortieth Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union *Checklist of North American Birds*, and there are some changes that concern North American birders. For a complete discussion, refer to Vol. 112, No. 3 of *The Auk* (the July, 1995 issue that was published belatedly in February of this year).

CHANGE the English names of American Swallow-tailed Kite to Swallow-tailed Kite; Rufous-necked Stint to Red-necked Stint; and Eurasian Sky Lark to Skylark.

SPLIT Gilded Flicker (a few nest near Cima) from Northern Flicker;

Scrub-Jay into Florida Scrub-Jay, Island Scrub-Jay (on Santa Cruz Island), and Western Scrub-Jay; Bicknell's Thrush from Gray-cheeked Thrush; Rufous-sided Towhee into Eastern Towhee and Spotted Towhee; Sharp-tailed Sparrow into Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (which occurs in California) and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow; and Northern Oriole into Baltimore Oriole and Bullock's Oriole.

The usually quiet time of late February and early March continued supplying surprises — mostly unusual overwintering birds that were missed earlier — as well as the beginning of spring migration.

A **Tricolored Heron** was found near the south end of the Salton Sea on 2 March (Michael Patten). The first **Swainson's Hawks** of the

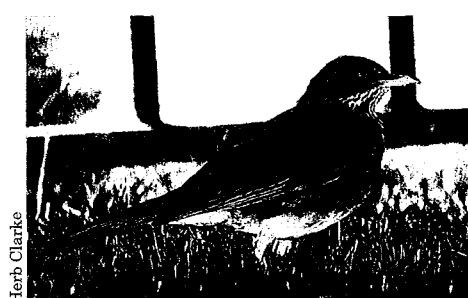
wintered on private property in Rolling Hills Estates (Martin Byhower). A good sized concentration of 120 **Mountain Plover** was in a field near Lancaster on 24 February (Kathleen McPeck and Bill Principe), and a **Ruff** was found near the south end of the Salton Sea on 12 March (Jim Abernathy, Dick Norton and Steve Sosensky).

A **Black-legged Kittiwake** was seen on the beach in El Segundo on 8 March (Gail Hightower), and a **White-winged Dove** showed up on 7 March in the same yard in Redondo Beach that hosted one last year (MB). An **Eastern Phoebe** was seen at the San Jacinto Wildlife Preserve on 5 March (Richard Barth), and a pair of **Vermilion Flycatchers** returned to the Big Morongo Reserve on 21 February (Mike Haldeman).

San Diego County's first **Rufous-backed Robin** was found in Borrego Springs on the LAAS field trip on 16 March (Kathy Ellsworth). **Sage Thrashers** were found commonly in the Antelope Valley in late February and March, and also in the San Jacinto Wildlife Preserve on 28 February (Peter Barnes), in Lakeview Terrace on 7 March (Doug Martin) and a movement through Anza-Borrego State Park on 16 March (Fred Heath and Priscilla Brodkin).

The first **Solitary Vireo** report of the spring comes from a yard in Whittier on 3 March (Larry Schmahl), and the first **Warbling Vireo** was found on the same date near Lower Castaic Lake (Jon Fisher).

A **Golden-winged Warbler**, Los Angeles County's sixth, turned up in Atwater on 1-3 March (DM). A



Rufous-backed Robin spring were reported passing over La Crescenta on 1 March (Kimball Garrett), over the Palmdale area on 5 March (Monte Taylor), and a flock of 12 over East Los Angeles on 8 March (Mary Carmona and Nick Freeman). A **Red-tailed Hawk** of the unusual **Harlan's** form was near the north end of the Salton Sea on 9 March (Andrew and Vernon Howe).

A **Sandhill Crane**, rare these days in Los Angeles County, over-

Prothonotary Warbler found near the Hall of Administration in downtown Los Angeles on 24 February (KG) was still present on 24 March.

An unusual hybrid **Green-tailed Spotted Towhee** was seen at California City on 25 February (MC & NF), and a **Black-throated Sparrow** was at Lower Castaic Lake on 3 March (JF). **Grasshopper Sparrows** were back on territory on the Santa Rosa Plateau on 10 March (Howard King), and a **Swamp Sparrow** was seen in Rubidoux on 15 March (AH).

A female **Rusty Blackbird** was near Quail Lake on 2 March (Tom Rohrer).

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

**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 8

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.

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

Sunday, May 19 — 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.

Saturday, June 1 — Sierra Vista. Biologist, birder and ex-docent **Scott Harris** will traipse through the tussocks in search of the elusive Grasshopper Sparrow, as well as other foothill and grassland species. This is one of the few spots in the southland that reports this bird annually. A visit to the Satwiwa Indian Cultural Center will follow, if open. Take the 101 Fwy N, exit at Wendy Ave. in Thousand Oaks, and continue S to the end. Turn right onto Potrero Rd., left at the first stop sign (still called Potrero Rd.) and left at the next stop sign onto Pinehill Rd. (which dead-ends into the parking lot). Meet at 7:30 A.M. and bird until noon.

Sunday, June 2 — Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See May 5 write-up for details.

Sunday, June 9 — Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See May 12 write-up for details.

Friday through Monday,

June 28 to July 1 —

Southern Sierras Weekend with **Bob Barnes**. Likely: 5 empids, 2 buntings, 4 grosbeaks, Goshawk, Pinyon Jay, 7 warblers, 14 sparrows, 3 goldfinches, 9 woodpeckers, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo 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 and Sunday, July 13 and 14 — Yosemite. Leader **Louis Tucker** will concentrate on local specialty birds such as Black-backed and Pileated Woodpeckers,

Blue Grouse, Great Grey Owl, Rosy Finch and Pine Grosbeak. 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. 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). Campsites on sale NOW through Destinet (800/436-7275). Trip limited to 14 participants by park rules. Reserve with SASE and \$20 to LAAS to receive trip flyer.

 **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. 

EVENING MEETING



Herb Clarke

California Gnatcatcher

Meet at 8:00 P.M. in Plummer Park.

Call the Bird Tape for information on possible ID Workshops.

May 14, 1996 Sophia Tsai

California Gnatcatcher — History and Conservation

Several years ago, Manomet Observatory's John Atwood determined that the California Gnatcatcher *was* a separate species from the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. Sophia Tsai, also from Manomet, will present the current status of the Gnatcatcher and the conservation efforts on behalf of this species and its coastal sage scrub habitat.

June 11, 1996 Olga Clarke

East Africa — Nature's Paradise

Olga's program will feature highlights of the LAAS African Wildlife Safari she will escort in November, 1996. Come have your birding appetite whetted for this almost-soldout adventure.

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

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. Gerry Haigh will lead participants through this diverse coastal mountain area. An ideal trip

for a beginning birder or someone new in the area. 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, 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 Regional Park. Join ranger **Ray Jillson** at 8:00 A.M. to view colorful migrants and early breeders. 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.

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

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