

# WESTERN TANAGER



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Costa Rica has long been popular with California birders, and rightly so. It has great birds, a good field guide, lots of infrastructure, and a high country list. Recently, however, Ecuador has been receiving increasing attention as well. The size of Colorado, Ecuador has a country list of 1,570. That means that compared to Costa Rica, for only 20% additional airfare and another hour of flying time, you can gain access to 80% more birds. Of course, a big total is of no use if you do not know where to look, but now with the release of a new site guide, Ecuador has become the best described birding destination in the Neotropics.

In its original design, this review was going to cover all the resources available for birding in Ecuador, from the Lonely Planet travel guide to the pioneering site information first published by Clive Green. Instead I want to focus just on one title, a new book from England which sets the standard for all other birding site guides in the world. It is titled *A Guide to Birdwatching in Ecuador and The Galápagos Islands*, and if you see it listed in LAAS Bookstore's catalog, you might not be able to tell from its name just how special this book is. Handling it, though, makes most people quick converts.

First thing, one sees how complete it is — at 500 densely-typed pages, it is closer in size and weight to the Howell and Webb Mexico field guide than it is to an old Peterson or Lane guide. (The new generation of birders will have to be



Charles Hood

tremendous athletes to carry the new guide books in the field with them, along with tape recorders and bug spray and enough sunscreen to compensate for the depletion of the ozone layer.) The book's size is justified by the 120 primary sites it describes, along with the very complete appendices of bibliographic information, mammal and bird lists, advice on making recordings, directories of conservation organizations, and lists of endangered and threatened species.

This is the book's most important advance over other birding material — it subtly yet consistently emphasizes various aspects of conservation. As with the rest of the world, Ecuador has its share of environmental crises; more so than the rest of the world, in Ecuador on-site, local efforts hold much promise for conservation success. Visiting birders can document range contractions or casually speak out against poaching or hire local guides or donate a few bucks to a school or buy a dinner in a local restaurant or stay in a newly built cabin and, in so doing, do their bit to preserve the world they love. This book's primary focus is on the best places for the best birds, but at the same time, reading it, you never forget that those birds can only exist while the habitat exists. In some cases, it is a race against time (the changes will happen, no matter what), and in others, a matter of raising a certain issue to a higher profile. By encouraging birders to visit a multitude of sites, some remote and many not at 4-star accommodation level, the book asks birders to share their interests (and their tourist dollars) with the people most directly involved with ecology, from lowland forests to Andean grasslands.

Like L.A. County, Ecuador is divided in two by a significant mountain range; like Los Angeles, it has an ocean on one side; but unlike L.A., it has a huge jungle (not a desert) on the other. The book logically separates the country into biogeographic regions ("east slope," "the south-west," etc.), listing five to

fifteen primary sites per block, as well as four to fourteen secondary spots. Main site entries include a star rating (zero to five, to show how "good" a place is), maps, comments on habitat, travel directions, bird lists, remarks on other special animals or plants, suggestions for accommodations, and a note on conservation issues. In a visit to Ecuador last June, I field tested rough drafts and found in general everything to be both accurate and helpful. The maps can be so detailed as to list specific buildings and shrines — very helpful in finding trails in a country with few road signs or kilometer markers — and bird lists alert you to rare records or species of special value for that region. My only remark is to remind birders not using experienced tour leaders or constant tape playback that the site lists represent collective totals, and a once-only, first-time visit will not get you everything on a given list. (In some cases, not even half, and in a few cases, not even ten percent, if my day totals were typical.) Charming pen and ink bird sketches fill in the occasional blank passages between one section and another, in a style made familiar by the Wings company tour brochures.

**T**he book's emphasis is on non-guided birding, at all budget levels. (Some sites require camping, for example.) There is enough information for five or six non-overlapping visits, at all times of year. Using this, in one month of nonstop, hardcore birding, a person could try for a 500 or 600 item trip list, including such tremendous "ticks" as Cock-of-the-Rock, Andean Condor, Oilbird, a few dozen hummingbird species, and trees so full of different kinds of tanagers the branches seem filled with Christmas ornaments. In reading the entries, I found myself pacing around the room, anxious to hop on a plane. There is something magical about the combination of the Andes with the Amazon, and this book is dangerous fuel. Quick, ma, hide the credit cards — the boy's got that look in his eyes again!

Of course there is no single, correct way to bird, and not all birders prefer independent travel. If you are planning to join a professional tour when going to Ecuador, should you still buy this? Yes — and not just because the money from sales is being channeled back into neotropical conservation. The individual site lists all include places tours regularly visit, and with this book you can get a big head start in preparing for the trip. With a bird guide specifically for Ecuador still forthcoming, any visits in the near future need to rely on Hilty's *Birds of Colombia*, backed up with handwritten additions taken from *Birds of the High Andes* or *Birds of South America*. This is a lot of information to process, and if you can break your studying into smaller subsets of material (as this guide allows), you are more likely to do better. If you're only going to the Galápagos, do you need it? No, not unless you're a die-hard lister, and if you were, you would be stopping on the mainland, and so would already have bought this anyway. The Galápagos section is a mere nine pages, and much of its content can be gathered from other sources. It is useful, but not essential.

I never met Jim Lane before he died, though I heard many colorful stories about him. It is my understanding he was one of those dawn to dusk kinds of birders, always ready to hike the extra mile to look around the next bend in the trail. His generosity in sharing his field notes helped thousands of people see trogons in Cave Creek Canyon, or Mangrove Cuckoos on Sugarloaf Key. This strikes me as exactly his kind of book. Its introduction explicitly tells readers to enjoy the sites listed but also not to rely just on the book, but to go out and discover another one hundred sites. Which one of us reading this magazine is going to be the one who pushes the Ecuador country list to 1,571? 🐦

*Charles Hood, whose background includes research on ethnopoetics in Papua New Guinea, teaches at Antelope Valley College.*

# Habitat Tern-About at the Salton Sea

by Kathy Molina

**C**hee-leep...chee-leep...chee-leep, the squeaky contact call of juvenile Gull-billed Terns, is commonly heard around the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge during late June as numerous fledglings tentatively embark on their maiden flights. The Salton Sea is one of only two locations in California where the Western Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica vanrossemei*) breeds; a small nesting colony also persists in San Diego Bay. An historic Salton Sea breeding species once numbering some 500 pairs at their discovery in 1927, Gull-billed Terns currently form a maximum population of 180 pairs at the Sea and the majority now nest at the National Wildlife Refuge. Loss of nesting habitat, due to progressive flooding over the last 50 years, may have played an important role in diminishing the number of breeding waterbirds here. Gull-billed Tern (and Black Skimmer) colonies at the Sea are unique in California, as they are the only nesting colonies for these species away from the coast.

A prompt response by refuge manager Clark Bloom to continued inundations of traditional, unprotected tern and skimmer nesting areas in 1995 has created a highly productive location for colonial ground-nesting birds. Previously

managed for loafing waterfowl in winter, this series of three shallow, freshwater ponds at refuge headquarters near Rock Hill now provides foraging and loafing areas, as well as protected nesting islets for terns, skimmers and shorebirds in spring and summer. Several pairs of the endangered Yuma Clapper Rail have consistently nested in the cattail pond in the upstream portion of the system. The freshwater flow-through system of the refuge impoundments is constructed and managed to isolate the nesting islets and to prevent the accumulation of selenium (a natural constituent of Colorado River water) as a result of the Salton Sea's high evaporative rate in spring and summer. The five earthen islets are reinforced with riprap along the windward edges to prevent erosion; a gravel and crushed barnacle layer distributed along the surface provides suitable substrate for terns and skimmers when forming their nestscrapes.

After we deployed wooden tern decoys, fashioned by refuge biologist Ken Sturm, on several of the impoundment islets early in 1995, Gull-billed Terns and Black Skimmers immediately established nesting territories making this site hugely successful in its first year of

existence. The number of Gull-billed Tern and skimmer nesting pairs continues to increase, and, this year, Caspian Terns also nested in substantial numbers.

On these water-locked islets, eggs and chicks have remained safe from terrestrial predators such as skunks, raccoons and coyotes. But these eggs and chicks are extremely sensitive to the Salton Sea's intense heat and solar radiation. To minimize disturbance to the nesting colony, and to ensure its future success, the northern, eastern, and southern perimeters of the impoundment are closed to foot and vehicle traffic; excellent views of the colony are afforded by the Rock Hill pedestrian trail.

While terns and skimmers seem to have emerged relatively unscathed by last summer's catastrophic botulism outbreak that claimed the lives of thousands of waterbirds (mostly White and Brown pelicans), significant conservation hurdles for Salton Sea wildlife still remain. Fluctuating sea levels, lack of protected nesting habitat, and the effects of pollutants, rising salinity, and changes in local water use policies still cloud the future of this paradoxical ecosystem: always fascinating but, sadly, often forgotten.

The Rock Hill nursery, the result of a simple twist to an existing management scheme — maintaining impoundment water levels during the breeding season — has received an immediate and overwhelming response by terns, skimmers and other nesting shorebirds. The Rock Hill impoundment should serve as a model for the creation of additional habitat for colonial ground nesting birds at the Salton Sea in the future. 🐦

*Kathy Molina has summered at the Salton Sea studying tern and skimmer populations since 1991 and has authored several scientific papers about their biology.*

*Black Skimmers tend nests on Rock Hill islet*



K.C. Molina

# Salton Sea Forum

**A**griculture, ecotourism, and water rights have brought the Salton Sea to political prominence. Last year's avian botulism outbreak reinforced to the political world that environmental conditions in the inland lake are not ideal. Audubon members should be involved as politicians and pub-

lic agencies seek to improve conditions at the Sea. Kathy Molina's article in this issue shows that progress can be made in managing Sea habitat for birds, so there are positive steps for which we can argue. Already, the San Diego Audubon Society is lobbying Audubon-California (the state office of the National

Audubon Society) to make the Salton Sea a conservation priority. Martin Byhower has some ideas about how to save the Salton Sea, and shares them in this as yet unpublished letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. For more information about the Salton Sea, or to become involved, leave your name, address and phone number at Audubon House (213-876-0202).

Dear Editor:

Any resolution to the water war between MWD and San Diego and Imperial Counties should take into consideration the effects of any of the proposed solutions upon the ecological integrity of the Salton Sea in Imperial County. Although little known outside the birdwatching, hunting, and wildlife-viewing community, the Sea and its surrounding wetlands, marshes, alkali and desert scrub, and especially the flooded agricultural fields surrounding the Sea, comprise one of the most critical wildlife habitats in the nation. The Sea lies directly on the Pacific flyway, and is host to nearly 300 species of migratory (and an additional 100 non-migratory) birds, particularly waterfowl, as well as mammals, reptiles, and other groups. We have lost over 90 percent of our wetlands in southern California and our national figure is nearly as high, yet for a sizable percentage of North America's remaining ducks, geese, pelicans, grebes, and other waterfowl, the rich Salton Sea is a crucial and irreplaceable resting and feeding habitat. Yet, the Sea is dying, due to increased salinity and pesticide and toxic chemical-rich agricultural wastewater from the surrounding areas as well as raw sewage and toxic industrial wastewater (from American-owned companies) in Mexico, which are its only water sources.

The Salton Sea Authority and others have proposed solutions, all of which require water, for saving the Sea. It is ironic, shameful and shortsighted that Imperial County would want to sell off its "surplus" Colorado River water without any accompanying provisions that call for the funding of the restoration of the ecological integrity of the Salton Sea. The long-term ecotourism and recreational value that would result from saving/restoring the Sea would vastly offset any initial diversions of funds to that end. If the Sea dries up, clouds of respiratory-system damaging dust reminiscent of the Owens Valley "mistake" could threaten the health of the agricultural workers and other citizens in Imperial County. Another valuable water resource, Mono Lake, was saved just in time by hard won but ultimately relatively painless changes to incorporate rational water management.

Haven't we learned any lessons from the preceding and other similar instances in which greedy water barons sponge the life out of a rich region while the innocent victims merely stand by? If farmers and land-grabbers in the Imperial Valley sell off the water rights to their acreage rather than continuing to farm it, unfathomable number of birds will die, having nowhere else to go. The MWD and certainly San Diego and Imperial Counties are not likely to offer any solutions. The state legislature and/or federal government have plenty of precedent for imposing conditions for a workable Salton Sea restoration project on any deal worked out between MWD, San Diego, and Imperial County.

Sincerely,

Martin Byhower  
Redondo Beach

# BOOKSTORE NEWS

Despite the name, the LAAS Bookstore sells more than books. In addition to high-quality optics and bird-related gift items, the Bookstore will soon stock Song Bird Coffee, grown in the shade of rainforest canopy trees. Those of you who drink coffee might consider "shade grown" because coffee grown in sun provides habitat for 97% fewer bird species than shade coffee. The coffee is endorsed by the ABA because it provides an incentive to Latin American countries to stop clearing forests for coffee plantations.

The Bookstore also has a wide selection of audio and video materials on birds and other natural history topics. Use the many titles to prepare for your next birding foray or simply enjoy them as an informative diversion.

As for books, one intriguing new title is *Kingbird Highway* by Kenn Kaufman (\$23). Billed as "the story of a natural obsession that got a little out of hand," Kaufman recounts coming of age through his transcontinental travels in search of birds. Pete Dunne writes in a liner note, "Move over Jack Kerouac, this is an on-the-road-classic. *Kingbird Highway* is part Audubon, part Huck Finn. The subject might be birding, but the story is freedom and finding. This is what being young in America in the seventies was all about."

The Bookstore is open 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., Tuesday through Saturday. Visit the store in Plummer Park in West Hollywood or call 213-876-0202. Visa/MasterCard accepted.

Video: *Penguin Odyssey*; visit the Falkland Islands and Antarctica to meet over a half dozen species of penguins and other wildlife; only the natural sounds of the animals and their environment are heard; 30 mins; Marine Mammal Fund, 1988 ..... 24.95

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Video: *Tropical Kingdom of Belize*; explore a diverse land of exotic creatures; 60 mins; National Geographic Society, 1995 ..... 19.95

Video: *Wilds of Madagascar*; explore the exotic wildlife of this beautiful, forbidding island; 60 mins; National Geographic Society, 1994 ..... 14.95

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Video: *Wild California*; a musical journey into the natural beauty of California's wilderness; let these images encourage you to travel and explore this great wilderness; 40 mins; Sea Studios, 1989 .. 19.95

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*Common Butterflies of California*; 127 full-page stunning photos of the common butterflies taken in their natural environment plus key field marks, range, host plant, etc.; Stewart, 1997 ..... 24.95

## WESTERN Tanager

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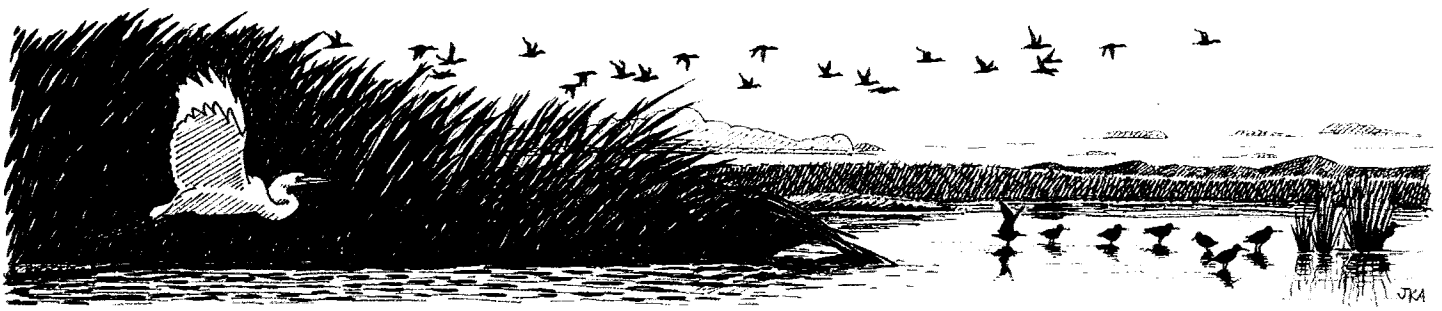
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# CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

**W**e were early when we arrived at City Hall where usually people straggle in for the 10 A.M. council meeting. When we opened the door to the council chamber, we were astonished at the size of the audience; standing room only — literally. The anxious residents of Sunland/Tujunga with their red badges boosting the golf course in Big Tujunga Wash far outnumbered the opposition sporting big yellow signs that read “Save Tujunga Wash!” We were anxious too. We needed ten votes out of fourteen (one member was absent) to defeat the approval of the permit to build the golf course, and those were pretty stiff odds. The City Planning Commission had unanimously given the green light to the developer, and it was only the legal appeals of the California Department of Fish and Game, two Audubon societies, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Sierra Club, a local property owners’ group and an Indian tribe that sent the matter to the city council. The council’s Planning and Land Use Committee had already approved the course, so we had plenty to worry about.

What were the main issues? The developer owned 350 acres of the wash and wanted to build a golf course to make a profit. Aware of the 10-year opposition to a golf course by conservation groups, he said he would dedicate 192 acres for a nature preserve to protect native plants — including the endangered slender-horned spineflower. Equestrian and bicycle trails would also be built. Joel Wachs, councilman of the district, joined the developer in

declaring that it was “the most environmentally sensitive” plan ever conceived. The wash, they said, was a messy dump full of trash, transients and drug dealers, and a golf course would clean it up. The course would upgrade the place, provide jobs and help local small business in a depressed area. Many of the neighboring residents bought the whole package and became enthusiastic lobbyists, appearing *en masse* at the various hearings and pleading their case with the press and the councilmembers. Increased property values were also at stake.

Those of us opposed to the golf course pointed out that not only was the wash a rare and valuable habitat but that it was the center of an extremely vulnerable flood plain. Violent flooding in the last 28 years had destroyed two main bridges and seven homes. The plan was to import 500,000 cubic yards of fill to build the greens, fairways and rough. A severe storm, we argued, would send the entire golf course down the wash and, quoting a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, “...an ecological habitat would be lost forever.” The plants and animals in the wash had evolved over thousands of years with floods and always survived. A golf course would not.

There was concern that herbicides and pesticides on the golf course would inevitably end up in the wash and flow downstream into Hansen Dam and nearby spreading grounds where it would percolate into the aquifer and then be pumped up for drinking water.

We asked if the wash was such a mess, why didn’t the owner clean it up and keep the miscreants out?

Four of us walked through the wash in April and found that, yes, there was trash on the periphery, but not in the interior. We saw no evidence of transients (charred firepits, cardboard ground cover) but a splendid array of cactus, yuccas and agaves in the midst of blooming native plants that had seeded in from the coastal sage scrub habitat above.

Responsible agencies take a dim view of the golf course. Joining State Fish and Game in their concern are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. The Army Corps of Engineers says that even a moderate storm will damage the course and, if so, it is likely that the waters of the United States will be impacted, bringing in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act which defeated the last attempt to build a golf course.

A wild card in the controversy was the labor union that was fighting the unfair labor practices of powerful Kajima International at the New Otani Hotel. Kajima has a lien on the golf course property and would profit if the project is a success. The union has been vigorously lobbying the councilmembers.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy had the land appraised and offered the fair market value of \$3.5 million, but the owner refused to sell.

**A**fter hearing last minute testimony from both sides, the councilmembers stood up and began their comments. Joel Wachs, self-anointed environmentalist, was quite eloquent in his defense of the developer who was so

concerned about the rare habitat that to protect it he had put aside a large portion of his property. He warned the council that to deny the developer the use of this property would be a "taking," with the city being subjected to an expensive law suit. Ruth Galanter came out strongly for preservation and made the motion to vote down the project. Jackie Goldberg, who previously said she would abstain from voting, said she had walked into the wash and was deeply impressed. "There is precious little of that kind of open space in all of southern California." Michael Feuer asked that we look beyond short-term matters and consider the future needs of the city for natural open space. Mike Hernandez, a blunt realist, accused the owner of not really wanting to build the golf course but holding out for more money. Richard Alarcon scoffed at the proposed \$65 greens fee, saying, "I can tell you, it is not

the people of the Northeast Valley who are going to be playing there." Nate Holden asked the golf course point man, Mark Armbruster, if he was a city commissioner and what commission he was on. When he got the answer — Environmental Affairs — Holden asked, "Might there not be a little conflict of interest here?" Laura Chick had voted with Hal Bernson in the planning committee to approve the golf course and none of us knew what she would do now. She said it was a difficult decision, a conflict between her head and her heart. She too had visited the wash, found it beautiful, and came away following her heart. Bernson said he still favored the golf course.

We'd been counting — 7 against, 2 for. Nervous time. None of the remaining councilmembers had given us a clue as to how they would vote. We needed 3 more; 2 more would have meant defeat and we needed 3

out of the 5 undeclared votes. A lot of time lobbying, letter-writing, testifying downtown was on the line. Then came the call to vote. The audience was silent, all attention on the technicolor scoreboard. The lights flashed on and there were only four votes for the golf course. We won! 10 to 4! Cheers and groans, embraces and muttered curses. Outside the council chamber the TV hawks were interviewing the principal players surrounded by the noise and excitement of a jubilant crowd.

Well, it ain't over 'til it's over. The developer will undoubtedly sue the city. The Conservancy may try to find more money, though they are restricted to offering no more than fair market value. Money may fall from heaven, though it will have to be more than pennies. The fact that there has been a victory here in a time of environmental decline is most encouraging. Don't give up the ship. Onward and Upward! 🐉

## Airport Expansion Planned

The Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) is currently preparing environmental review documents for its expansion plans through the year 2015. One of the alternatives, known as "Concept 3," would extend runways over 100 of the remaining 300 acres of the El Segundo dunes. All of the alternatives involve the construction of a new terminal on the western end of the airport, next to the dunes, and would increase air traffic dramatically. Look for the completed environmental review documents this fall, and let your elected representatives know your opinion about the expansion plans. 🐉

## Songbirds Decline in Southwest

A recent study by the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station reports that of all songbirds in New Mexico for which sufficient information exists, 77% (46 of 61) have declined significantly since 1964 and that in Arizona and New Mexico combined, 66% have declined since 1964. They also report that logging (particularly of snags and large pines) and overgrazing (by reducing grass habitat and causing pine thickets) are the biggest threats to forest songbirds. (Source: Southwest Center for Biological Diversity) 🐉

## Swainson's Hawk Victory

It can be done! The March/April *Tanager* reported the 1995 loss of 20,000 Swainson's Hawks in Argentina caused by the powerful pesticide monocrotophos. The American Bird Conservancy called for an international conference on the tragedy which resulted in an unusually civilized response. Toxicologists verified the cause of the loss, the chief manufacturer of the chemical withdrew it from sale and all suppliers not only stopped selling it but bought back what remained of the product on retailer's shelves. This year only 26 birds were found dead and these were outside the 1995 affected area. Hallelujah! There's still hope. 🐉

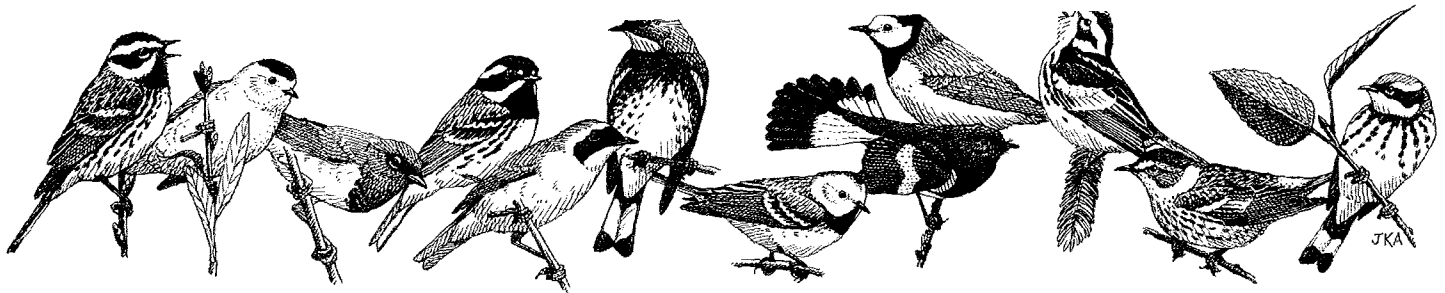
## Endangered Species Act Reauthorization

Representative George Miller (D-CA) and 53 co-sponsors introduced the Endangered Species Recovery Act (ESRA) to amend and reauthorize the Endangered Species Act. ESRA provides an alternative to the Kempthorne-Chaffee bill, which would weaken species protection. Environmental groups have quickly endorsed ESRA because of its strengthened provisions and emphasis on species recovery. 🐉

## Antarctic Heat Wave! Penguins Suffer

In an alarming development that has shocked even climate scientists, *Newsweek* reported in August that average year-round temperatures have climbed 5° in Antarctica over the last 50 years, and average mid-winter temperatures by 9°, consistent with predictions that global warming will be felt first and disproportionately at the poles. Already, Emperor Penguins are dwindling because of less sea ice and shrimplike krill to eat. (Source: ESA Action) 🐉





# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Kimball L. Garrett

It's difficult to generalize about the June and July period for southern California because the birds are doing just about every thing imaginable. Spring migrants are routinely moving through the region during the first week or two of June, and stragglers and vagrants may be found through the remainder of the month, overlapping the earliest fall migrant shorebirds and hummingbirds which are the hallmark of the last week or so of June. At Malibu Lagoon, one might find a straggling Willow Flycatcher on 10 June, a vagrant warbler and a fall migrant Greater Yellowlegs on 25 June, breeding swallows under the bridges in early July, and wintering (!) Snowy Plovers on the beach by mid-July. At the same time, post-breeding families of Least Terns disperse to line the lagoon's beach and northbound Elegant Terns pass through to spend the late summer and early fall in more productive coastal waters to the north. With this backdrop of confusion and orderly chaos, I'll try to outline some of the more interesting events this summer.

First, however, we should review some changes in species taxonomy and nomenclature affecting our area which were published by the American Ornithologists' Union in its 41st Supplement to the Checklist of North American Birds (*Auk* 114:542-552, 1997). These changes are not a cruel torture inflicted upon stability-obsessed amateurs by stuffy old taxonomists in stuffy old museums. Rather, they are an attempt to keep taxonomy and nomenclature current by incorporating published studies which reflect

our growing knowledge of the shifting and evolving realities of biology. The AOU changes go far beyond the few cases I cite below — numerous additional changes affect Neotropical species south of the United States, the sequence in which species are listed, or changes in family-level designations. Changes affecting California include:

— Black-footed, Laysan and Short-tailed albatrosses are placed in the genus *Phoebastria*.

— New World vultures (including our California Condor and Turkey Vulture) are placed in the Order Ciconiiformes, and follow the storks in checklists.

— American Golden-Plover's scientific name is corrected to *Pluvialis dominica*.

— The Asiatic form of the Marbled Murrelet (the one recorded as a vagrant over much of North America, but not yet in southern California) is split as *Brachyramphus perdix*, the Long-billed Murrelet.

— Parakeet Auklet becomes *Aethia psittacula*.

— "Canary-winged Parakeet" is split into *Brotogeris chiriri* (Yellow-chevrons Parakeet) and *B. versicolurus* (it is unclear whether Canary-winged Parakeet will be retained as the name of this species, or whether it will be renamed White-winged Parakeet).

— Burrowing Owl reverts to *Athene cunicularia*.

— Olive-sided Flycatcher becomes *Contopus cooperi*.

— The shrikes, vireos, and corvids (jays and crows), in that sequence, will now be listed after the tyrant flycatchers and before the larks.

— Cliff and Cave swallows are

placed in the genus *Petrochelidon*.

— Our chickadees are moved to the genus *Poecile*.

— Our titmice are moved to the genus *Baeolophus*; the "Plain" Titmouse is split into two species, the Oak Titmouse (*B. inornatus*, the species occurring west of the deserts) and the Juniper Titmouse (*B. ridgwayi*, breeding southwest to the White Mountains and mountains of the east Mojave Desert).

— The "Solitary Vireo" is split into the Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*), Plumbeous Vireo (*V. plumbeus*) and Blue-headed Vireo (*V. solitarius*).

— The "Red Bishop" is formally split into *Euplectes orix* (Red Bishop) and *E. franciscanus* (Orange Bishop, also known as Northern Red Bishop). The latter is the one established in coastal southern California.

Now for the birds of the season... Late migrants and vagrants trickled through montane forests during June. Perhaps most unusual was a singing male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** found north of Chilao on 16 June by Mark Wimer and Barbara Massey. A **Townsend's Warbler** found in the high San Gabriel Mountains in late June by Tom Wurster was nearly as unexpected. A **Blue-winged Warbler** and **Black-and-white Warbler** were along a stretch of Big Rock Creek on the north side of the San Gabriels on 21 June (Kimball Garrett), and another Blue-winged was reported from Switzer's Picnic Area on the coastal slope of the San Gabriels the next day (Andrew Birch). In the lowlands, a **North-**



**ern Waterthrush** was singing on the Loyola Marymount campus in Westchester on 14 June (Russell Stone), and a female **Northern Parula** was at Bonelli Park near Pomona on 30 June (Robb Hamilton).

Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas work continues to turn up new and wondrous information. Scarcer breeding (or presumed breeding) species found this summer included a **Gray Vireo** west of the confluence of Pallett Creek and Big Rock Creek near Valyermo (MW and KG, 14 June), at least two **Mexican (Stephens') Whip-poor-wills** calling near the Arch Picnic Area just north of Big Pines through most of June (KG), and at least two pairs of **Summer Tanagers** along Big Rock Creek in Valyermo (KG). Daniel Cooper found two more pairs of **Summer Tanagers** along the Santa Clara River in Soledad Canyon, as well as this year's most significant Atlas find: a nest-building **Willow Flycatcher** (presumably of the endangered subspecies *extimus*) in the same area on 18 June. **Spotted Sandpiper** nests were found along Big Rock Creek near Valyermo and in the Devil's Gate Dam Basin in Pasadena this June (KG); this spe-

cies is scarce as a documented breeder in the county. Two recently fledged **Spotted Owls** were found in Big Santa Anita Canyon on 30 July (TW and Mike San Miguel).

Breeding Bird Atlas work highlights many conservation issues in the county. **Caspian Terns** attempted to nest once again this year on a new fill area in Los Angeles Harbor (Kathy Keane); this site will soon be a busy container port. Ironically, habitat mitigation required of the developers of new port facilities in Los Angeles and Long Beach harbors is carried out in places like San Diego County. Why not mitigate near the site of the environmental damage? The simple construction of nesting habitat islands within the harbor would almost certainly guarantee breeding of one or more sensitive tern species and perhaps skimmers as well. The Santa Clara River in the Valencia area is living on borrowed time as the Newhall Ranch development draws ominously closer to reality. Endangered **Bell's Vireos** occurred once again this year in the area, along with a suite of other sensitive riparian species. Local conservation groups continue to oppose this megadevelopment in an effort to preserve the most important riparian habitat

in the county and force the end of unlimited suburban sprawl.

A confounding factor in atlasing is the phenomenon of post-breeding dispersal. For example, Sage Sparrows of the subspecies *canescens* nest in the Antelope Valley and adjacent dry slopes, but move in large numbers (and often in family groups) uphill and coastward into the breeding range of "Bell's" Sage Sparrows (*belli*) as early as June. Determining the breeding distribution of our two subspecies of Sage Sparrows will remain tricky unless and until field identification criteria for the two groups are better established. By late June, species such as Western Tanagers and Lazuli Buntings appear to be dispersing or migrating widely. "Fall" migration, of course, may begin in earnest by mid-July when other populations of the same species are still breeding. Matt Heindel counted 12 **Warbling Vireos** and 26 **Black-headed Grosbeaks** well away from breeding areas on the Kern County desert on 19 July!

The long-lingering **Lewis's Woodpecker** in La Cañada Flintridge was last seen on 19 July (Gayle Hightower). The only other trace of last winter's "invasions" was the occasional flock (and a few documented nestings) of **Red Crossbills**. As I write this on 1 August, I note that by this time last year the irruption of nuthatches into the lowlands had already begun!

The small **California Gull** colony established this year at the south end of the Salton Sea fledged several young (Kathy Molina); success of **Caspian** and **Gull-billed terns** and **Black Skimmers** was high there as well. The summering **Little Gull** off Davis Rd. at the south end had completed its molt into basic adult plumage by 27 July (Guy McCaskie). Twenty or more **Wood Storks** frequented the south end, though their favorite perching trees near the south end of Davis Rd. were intentionally burned to the ground by the property owner this summer!

The tern and skimmer colony at Bolsa Chica was thriving again this

*Juvenile Gull-billed Tern in flight*



K.L. Garrett

year, with well over 1,000 young **Elegant Terns** banded by Charlie Collins and his crew. Both **Sooty** and **Sandwich terns** were seen sporadically through July. Although breeding success was good, one wonders about the fate of the young as this year's El Niño/Southern Oscillation event unfolds. Several dead juvenile **Cassin's Auklets** washed up on Los Angeles County beaches in June and early July, perhaps hinting at the problems seabirds might experience. Birders salivating at the prospect of long-distance vagrancy in seabirds induced by the developing El Niño might want to take a reality check. There is little precedent for such vagrancy (though there are some correlations, such as a more northerly dispersal of Elegant Terns during El Niño events). Almost unprecedented was this year's complete absence of Magnificent Frigatebirds

in southern California as of the beginning of August (although one or two were reported in the Bay Area); it seems that El Niño fans were expecting California frigates in droves because of the warm water!

No "Birds of the Season" column is complete without a mention of an exotic or two. Scott Smithson's studies of **Nutmeg Mannikins** in the region continue; of great interest was his resighting of a bird he color-banded in Arcadia several days later in Whittier Narrows, some ten miles to the south! Of interest on the parrot front was a large mixed flock of **Yellow-chevroned** and **Canary-winged ("White-winged") parakeets** in Redondo Beach in late July (MSM).

September and October will mark the most frenzied period of fall migration (for the birders, not the birds), though the peak of migration will be well past for some

species. Wintering landbirds will arrive in droves, and a great many waterbirds will be on the move. Observers are urged to carefully cover their favorite "patches" throughout this period — such coverage, with good record-keeping, contributes far more to our knowledge (and to the observer's enjoyment) than the knee-jerk chasing of reported rarities that has plagued "modern" birding. 🐦

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

**Kimball Garrett**  
L.A. County Museum of Natural History  
900 Exposition Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90007  
E-mail: garrett@bcf.usc.edu  
Or call **Jon Fisher** at 818-544-5009.

LAAS Bird Tape: 213-874-1318

# PELAGIC TRIPS

**P**elagic species often seen are Pink-footed, Sooty, Short-tailed and Black-vented shearwaters, Red Phalarope, Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Surf-bird, Pomarine Jaeger, Arctic Tern, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Xantus' Murrelet, Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities include: Black-legged Kittiwake, South Polar Skua, Tufted or Horned puffins. Mammals include: Gray Whale, Dall's Porpoise, Pacific Bottlenosed, Common and Risso's dolphins. Marine mammal expert Linda Lewis will be one of our leaders when her schedule permits.

**Saturday, September 13 — San Miguel Island with wet landing.** 17-hour trip departs from Ventura. Hike features beautiful island flora and fauna as well as several races of birds and migrants. More uncommon birds seen on the way to the island include Buller's and Flesh-

footed shearwaters and Sabine's Gull. \$95 includes dinner.

**Saturday, September 27 — Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon.** 8-hour trip departs from San Pedro. Birds of interest include Northern Fulmar, cormorants, phalaropes and rocky shorebirds. \$28, no galley.

**Sunday, October 19 — Channel Islands.** 12-hour trip departs from Ventura, visits Anacapa, Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz islands. Birds of interest may include Black, Least and Ashy storm-petrels, up to 3 cormorants, up to 10 gulls, up to 5 rocky shorebird species and Craveri's Murrelet. \$65, galley.

**Friday and Saturday, October 24 and 25 — Continental Shelf.** 24-hour trip departs from Santa Barbara. Rarities could include Laysan Albatross, Red-tailed

Tropicbird, Red-footed Booby and Cook's Petrel. \$160 for single bunk and three meals.

**Sunday, November 16 — Santa Barbara Island and Osborne Banks.** 12-hour trip departs from San Pedro. \$44, no galley. 🐦

## REFUND POLICY FOR 24-HOUR PELAGIC TRIPS

**I**f a participant cancels 31 days or more prior to departure, a \$5 service charge will be deducted from the refund. There is no participant refund if requested less than 30 days before departure, unless there is a paid replacement available. Call LAAS for a possible replacement. *Please do not offer the trip to a friend as it would be unfair to those on the waiting list.*

*Continued from page 12*

**Sunday, September 21 — Lake Palmdale.** Kimball Garrett will lead a select few on a tour of this restricted and little-birded bit of L.A. county. Waterbirds and migrating passerines should be prominent. Meet at the E end of the Park-and-Ride adjacent to Lake Palmdale. Take Hwy 14 N to the Avenue S offramp heading E, followed by a quick right into the lot. Meet here at 7:00 A.M. sharp, and finish around noon. Note: permission is still pending for access to the lake. Send a \$5 refundable check to Audubon House to sign up. All attendees will be refunded their checks. *Strict maximum of 15.*

**Sunday, September 28 — Oxnard Plains.** Leader Fred Heath will be exploring the wind-breaks and thickets that criss-cross the agricultural plains around Oxnard. Usually excellent for warblers, vireos, and other migrants. Possible vagrant chasing. From Hwy 101, take Las Posas Rd. S, turn right on Pleasant Valley Rd., and left on Laguna Rd. If coming via Hwy 1, take Pleasant Valley Rd. inland to Laguna Rd. and turn right. Meet at the side of Laguna Rd. across from the Big House at 8:00 A.M. Bring a lunch and bird into the afternoon, if you wish.

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

**Sunday, October 5 — Warbler Workshop.** Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett. Fresh from their latest collaboration — *A Field Guide to Warblers of North America* — these two masters of field I.D. will make identification and appreciation of this large group of stunning birds easier. Material will be balanced to address some technical topics without alienating intermediate birders. 3:00–5:30 P.M. lecture, 5:30–7:00 P.M. dinner break, 7:00–

9:00 P.M. lecture continues. \$25 fee. Location: Braun Auditorium, Huntington Memorial Hospital, 100 W. California Blvd., Pasadena. Send SASE to LAAS for details.

**Saturday, October 11 — Mojave Vicinity.** Leaders Nick and Mary Freeman. We will carpool to Galileo Hills in search of late migrants and early winter birds, then return to California City Central Park for birds and lunch. We may bird Butterbreth Springs, time and conditions permitting. Come prepared for a possibly hot, dusty, fun day. Take Hwy 14 out past Mojave, continue N on Hwy 14 about 6 miles to California City Blvd. Drive E through town, Meet at the California City Golf Course parking lot just past the driving range on the N side of the boulevard E of town. We will meet at 8:00 A.M. Allot about 2 hours driving time from LA. Call LAAS to register. Limited to 14.

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

**Saturday, October 18 — Malibu to McGrath.** Larry Allen will be leading interested parties up the coast from Malibu Lagoon to McGrath Estuary, stopping along the way to bird and picnic. A good cross-section of resident, migrant and wintering species expected. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the kiosk by the Malibu Lagoon lot. Take PCH northwest over the bridge, turn right and park on Cross Creek Road (free), and walk across the highway to the kiosk. Bring a lunch. Possible \$2 access fee at one spot.

**Sunday, October 19 — Ballona Wetlands.** Leader Bob Shanman. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 21 write-up for details.

**Sunday, October 26 — Sepulveda Basin Natural Area.** Leader Steve Ducatman. In past years, some good birds have shown up in this wild spot and adjacent parklands. Meet at Woodley Park at

## LAAS Needs You!

Field Trip Chairman Nick Freeman is stepping down at the first of the year. He has graciously given the Board many months notice, but his will certainly be a tough position to fill. The Board is interested in hearing from people who might be willing to take on this challenging responsibility. If you are interested, please leave a message at Audubon House (213-876-0202). We will hold off on our official thanks to Nick and Mary for so many years of excellent service, as we have them for one more issue. Thank goodness! 🐦

8:00 A.M. Take Burbank Blvd. W from the 405 Fwy, turn right onto Woodley Ave. and continue to the Woodley Park entrance on the right. Meet in the first parking area.

**Sunday, November 2 — Topanga State Park.** Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 7 write-up. 🐦

Insufficient response to reservations cancels trips two Wednesdays prior to the scheduled date (four weeks for pelagics); you will be 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 provide information about field trips. Office staff is also available Tuesday through Saturday for most reservation services.

### Reservation and Fee Events (Limited Participation) Policies and Procedures

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

# EVENING MEETINGS

Evening meetings resume in September. All members and guests from the general public are invited to enjoy these monthly slide presentations. Meetings begin at 7:30 P.M. in the public meeting room of Plummer Park in West Hollywood. Access from Santa Monica Blvd. or Fountain Ave. west of La Brea Ave. Refreshments are served afterward at the LAAS Bookstore.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1997**

**Dr. Patricia Baird**, California State University, Long Beach, will discuss her recent work on the **Least Tern**, including findings on feeding ecology, breeding biology and the effect of ESPN's "X Games" on the Mariner's Point Least Tern population in San Diego.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1997**

**Jesse Grantham**, National Audubon Society's Western Sanctuaries Director, will present "**Audubon Habitats**," a popular workshop on wildlife enhancement techniques homeowners may incorporate into their gardens and yards to attract birds, and that may well benefit some bird populations.

# FIELD TRIPS

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.

**Saturday, September 6 — Ventura Shorebirds, etc.** Leader **Steven Tucker**. Meet at the Hueneme sod fields to look over the plovers, then look for shorebirds and songbirds, depending on what spots are hot. Windbreaks on the plain for warblers and other songbirds. Mugu estuary, local duck clubs and Saticoy settling ponds are also possibilities. One or more vagrants usually seen here about this

time. From the 101 W, take Las Posas Rd. S to Hueneme Rd. W. Meet at 8:00 A.M. on the S side of Hueneme Rd. just before Casper Rd. and about 1.5 miles W of PCH. Bird until 2:00 P.M. or until we see all the birds. Scopes helpful.

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

**Sunday, September 14 — Whittier Narrows Regional Park.** Join ranger **Ray Jillson** to view colorful resident and migrating birds including Northern Cardinal. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the Nature Center at 1000 Durfee Ave. Take the 60 Fwy to south El Monte, just W of the 605 Fwy, taking the Peck Drive exit S. Take the offramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right), and make a left into the nature center. \$2 voluntary donation suggested by the park.

**Sunday, September 21 — Ballona Wetlands.** **Bob Shanman** will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland. Shorebird migration and early sea ducks among the expected fare. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at the Del Rey Lagoon parking lot. Take the Marina Fwy (90 West) to Culver Blvd., turn left for about a mile, then right on Pacific Ave. The lot is on the right. Lot or street parking is usually not a problem. Three-hour walk. Scopes helpful.

Los Angeles Audubon Society  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard  
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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*Continued on page 11*