

WESTERN TANAGER



Volume 64 Number 5 May/June 1998

Los Angeles Audubon Society



First Place

Black Skimmer

Photo by Phyllis Barry

Photo Contest Winners

The February meeting was our annual photo contest and the winners have honored us with the photos on this page.



Third Place *Brown Pelican* *Photo by Phyllis Barry*



Second Place *Great Horned Owl* *Photo by Janet Evander*



Bird Trivia for Fun and Profit

Would you bet \$50 that you could correctly predict the most widespread bird species nesting in Los Angeles county? If you read the last *Western Tanager*, you know that Larry's Allen's bet would be on Red-tailed Hawk, favored over House Finch and Mourning Dove among others. What if I said double or nothing if you also correctly guessed the least widespread (regularly breeding) species? Would you guess Least Tern? Willow Flycatcher? Wilson's Warbler?

The odds of making a profit are better if you put your money in an interest bearing account. In a couple of years you can use some of that money to buy a copy of the Los

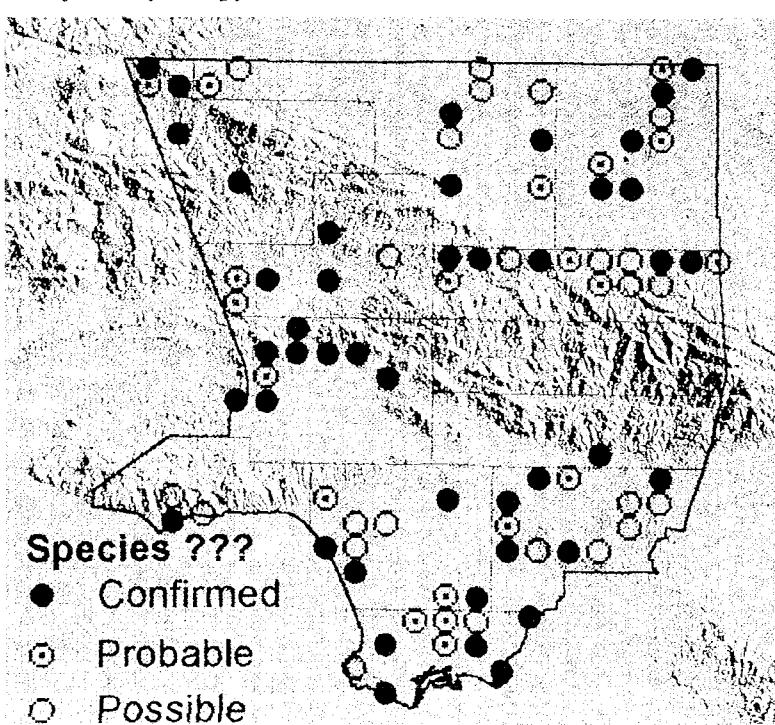
Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas, where you can get the answers to all of these questions.

But the surefire way to profit is to dig into the principal now and spend it on gas to get out birding in the far flung regions of our beautiful and diverse county. Reap the riches that come from hearing a LeConte's Thrasher or Yellow Warbler singing, or from watching fledgling Verdins or Cactus Wrens pop out of their bulbous nests.

As you observe all of this natural beauty, write it down. Then send it in to the Breeding Bird Atlas. This way the birds will profit too.

The atlas is starting its fourth (out of five) field seasons, and we are especially looking for atlasers to cover the northern parts of the county. To ask for forms or more information contact:

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Can you name the species whose breeding distribution is mapped above? Look for the answer on page 7

Close Calls

by Callyn Yorke

I canceled my biology classes today to go birding. Administratively this is a gray area. I'm calling it "personal necessity leave." A holy day of obligation. In late November orthodox birders are expected to drop everything and rush to the sea. At this time in Southern California, hard-driving pilgrims pray for one hundred species in a day. With impeccable karma they could attain nirvana (> 150 species).

"Did you call the bird box?"

"Yeah. Black Scoters at Venice pier. Thayer's Gull at Malibu," Charles says, watching the pastoral landscape of Leona Valley scroll by at sixty plus.

"Meadowlark — Brewer's Blackbird — ferruge?...no, red-tail — and another one."

This is "drive-by" birding. I check the mirror. No police. We level off at seventy.

A traffic report on the radio had mentioned a problem on the 14 at Sand Canyon. An overturned truck was blocking two lanes. So we're taking San Francisquito Canyon Road south to Santa Clarita and then to Interstate 5. The alternate route on secondary roads adds tiresome miles and uses precious daylight.

We are anxious. An arctic storm is due anytime. El Niño is here. Anything could turn up. Consider the Band-tailed (Belcher's) Gull from South America that recently appeared on a beach in San Diego. It was the rarest bird I had ever seen in California.

After gearing down for the pass at Grass Mountain, we gain speed on a long downhill run through a corridor of oaks. How quickly the life-zones have changed! Fifteen minutes ago we were in the Mojave desert, followed by grassland, riparian, chaparral, and now oak woodland. A Scrub Jay swoops over the road. Deja vu. We are passing through Green Valley, my home for nearly ten years. By the time I left,

my yard list had reached eighty-one bird species.

We come up fast on a pickup towing a vacation trailer. Mile after winding mile, turnout after turnout we move at the pace of a funeral procession. Suddenly the trailer turns onto the narrow shoulder of a blind curve and stops. I floor it and overtake safely. Charles is silent. I start to laugh. But it wasn't very funny. I had seen too many bad wrecks on this road. It was the main reason I had decided to move out of Green Valley three years ago.

"Great place to pull over," I say to the mirror.

Charles changes the subject. "Did you hear about the stolen booby?"

"What?"

"A Brown Booby was found in San Diego. Before many more people could see it, someone put the bird in a burlap sack and drove off with it."

We laughed hysterically. There are plenty of uncertainties in birding, but here was one wholly unanticipated: birdnapping. He went on to explain that the bird was thought to be injured and might have been taken by an animal rescue unit.

I imagined a gang initiation where a new recruit had to locate a rare bird (already identified by the proper authorities), shoot it and make a clean getaway. Good thing the bird box has a loon-proof security code!

In about two-and-a-half hours we arrive at Malibu Lagoon. Cars speed by us as we walk under a row of eucalyptus trees. The wooden entrance booth is locked up tight. There are two cars in the parking lot and three fiberglass outhouses — the first two with padlocks, the third filled to the rim.

Gulls soar high above the estuary. A wheeling flock of starlings alights in the golden canopy of a sycamore. We set up the scope and scan the marsh. Waterbirds are scattered in small flocks along the slough and mudflats. We see scores of coots, two Snowy Egrets, and at least twenty Green-winged Teal.

Hundreds of resting gulls — still a little too far to study, pull us closer to the beach. But first we stop to examine a smaller flock of gulls on a sandy inlet curving off the main creek.

"Hey Charles... this might be... yes, look at the checkered wings and mantle... and the small head and bill... this is a first winter Thayer's Gull!"

"I'm not sure. It looks too dark."

"Some of them are dark, you know. What else could it be?"

For me this is birding at its finest: close calls on bird identification. If we were astronomers the debate would be focused on a star, a comet, or something nebulous. But here, only twenty yards away is a tangible, endothermic, air-breathing organism — a possible Thayer's Gull! Perhaps not so rare as a Glaucous Gull or Little Gull, but one that can be challenging to pick out of a crowd of look-a-likes. We take turns with the scope. The bird ignores us while vigorously preening its breast feathers and wing coverts. Nearby Western and Herring Gulls provide us with comparisons.

Eventually my skeptical companion is convinced. "OK, Thayer's Gull."

We move to the outer shore. A few surfers clad in full-length wet-suits are floating, paddling, and watching perfectly curving waves of three to four feet. One of them gets up and takes a short ride into the white water. A raft of scoters bobs near a cluster of mussel-covered rocks. A couple of Western Grebes are sleeping beyond the breakers. The tide is going out. Most of the bird life is on the shore.

Several Snowy Plovers, Black and Ruddy Turnstones, Least Sandpipers, Willets and one Whimbrel forage busily in an exposed bed of rocks and wet sand. A second-winter Western Gull is having some difficulty with a large mussel. The bird drops it, picks it up, maneuvers it sideways in its beak, and walks away from us, looking at us as though we might steal it.

Charles lifts a stone. Water

seeps in beneath it. He is looking for a sea urchin test or some little souvenir for a friend. But aside from an assortment of algae and mussel shells, the shoreline has little to offer. He settles for a dark pebble with an abstract pattern of white veins. I say nothing of the misdemeanor: we are on a State Beach and nature is supposedly protected.

How well protected? On weekends people let their dogs loose to harass flocks of shorebirds. Malibu Creek deposits boards, plastic bottles, shoes, rags, and dead shorebirds onto mudflats black as crude oil. "No Swimming" signs are posted. Today a grim looking man on a tractor is pulling a steel plow of curved blades. Back and forth he goes, grooming the beach with straight little furrows. He avoids going close to the water. There, Sanderlings are probing the wet sand for polychaetes. If those birds were starving or ingesting poison, we wouldn't know until someone performed dissections on the washed-up carcasses.

"Mockingbird."

"Where?"

"On the roof of that house, the one with the plastic Great-horned Owls."

"Got it."

Most of the waterfront homes here have flat roofs — convenient roost sites. Evidently, some people are not fond of homeless birds, so they have attempted to scare them off with fake owls. But birds, like most creatures, quickly habituate to lifeless models.

"Did you notice the stuffed deer on the wall in that house?"

I hadn't noticed. Oddly enough, the bust of a large buck was mounted on a wall in full view through a picture window overlooking the marsh. Was that supposed to frighten away vegetarians? Who might live there...the president of the NRA? We're terribly sorry, folks, but the law is very clear on this point: if you live in a significant ecological area such as Malibu Lagoon, you must be a famous naturalist, such as Marty Stouffer or Jim Carey.

Furthermore, your official yard list must be in plain view at all times.

Charles is onto something by the bridge.

"That homeless guy over there just tried to skip a stone. The stone plopped and sank. I guess that's the story of his life..."

... here comes a loon... flying directly at us!"

"Common Loon," I blurt out with authority. "It's going down in the creek."

We study the bird and agree. We were hoping it might be another species, say Red-throated. The bird dives and stays down longer than our patience lasts.

"Charles, look under the bridge — in the shade, beyond that homeless guy — aren't those female Wood Ducks? Try the scope."

"All I see are Mallards and teal."

Scopes are supposed to solve problems, not create new ones. I guess that is why birders are attracted to increasingly powerful optics: 40, 50, 60x, and up. Birding is now a branch of astronomy. And this is silly because if you are not close enough to see a bird with ordinary binoculars, you are not close enough to learn much about it. The solution: walk softly and carry a small scope.

Upstream we find a few more birds for our day list — Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Ruddy Duck, Canada Goose, and what is this? Swimming out from the embankment we are standing on — two female Wood Ducks. Beautiful creatures they are, though dull in comparison to the resplendent drake, which is apparently absent. The two hens swim slowly, cautiously, almost coyly, looking up at us but not leaving the immediate area as the other ducks had done moments earlier. They seem to trust us. Are they released captives? No way to be sure. We count them anyway. The homeless man has curled up and gone to sleep in the dirt under the bridge.

After a rather hurried lunch at a pizza place in Malibu, we travel up the coast a few miles to Pt. Dume State Beach. Not many people there. The bay is choppy. Parallel to the

shore, we drive slowly toward sea cliffs about a mile south of the entrance.

"Jaeger! Pomarine Jaeger!" Charles shouts, looking out the window.

I pump the brakes. No way. Probably a Heerman's Gull, I'm thinking.

"Where?"

"Three o'clock, going north, low, just beyond the surf."

"Yes! Bulky profile — heavy wing strokes — Pomarine. Great bird. Good call!"

In milliseconds we are out of the car and trudging toward the shore. I am untangling my hat string when Charles comes up with another surprise.

"Black-vented Shearwaters — below the horizon, moving fast."

My hat is airborne.

"Yes! Yes! About ten of them — and there's another flock! Wow!"

Charles is in his domain. Well, pretty close to it. He had been on many boat trips in recent years and had learned about sea birds. Without his help today, I probably would have been jaeger-less and left guessing the identity of the shearwaters.

We take a steep, sandy trail to a crumbling promontory. Brisk onshore winds jostle us. The view is magnificent.

This is my kind of oceanic birding. I would be out here every day if I lived on the coast. I could find some incredible birds. Best of all, my feet would be on the ground, not slipping out from under me on a pitching deck of a smelly old fishing boat.

Safely away from the edge of a precipice is a slab of concrete where we can sit and watch the sea. A few Western Gulls and a Bonaparte's Gull splash down near a Harbor Seal rolling over at the surface. A dozen or more seals huddle on the shelf of a conical buoy a mile away. At eye level about twenty Brandt's Cormorants are clinging to guano-covered ledges, their droppings enriching the surging waters below. A flotilla of Surf Scoters slips over the waves. Several are diving successfully for bivalves. Two or three

White-winged Scoters are among them.

Earlier, I had tried to change an immature White-winged Scoter into an eider, then a Black Scoter, then a HEY-WHAT-THE — IS-THIS!

Charles knew better. He was patient, perhaps because he was waiting for me to really blow it by announcing I had found a penguin or something. Looking again, I agreed — a premature call. Happily, such mistakes can be contagious. Charles shouted into the wind "Pigeon Guillemot?" His bird was a Pelagic Cormorant. So we were even.

In a few more minutes onshore winds pick up, the sky is uniformly gray and the sea has lost its sparkle. It may rain soon. A satisfied weariness sets in. Time to head back.

At the park-and-ride in Palmdale, Charles collected his gear and loaded it into his truck. I got out to stretch. The drive back to the Antelope Valley had taken about two hours. We had missed most of the commuter traffic.

Considering our relatively late start and a survey limited to only two coastal sites, we were pleased with the results. Our day's total was 84 species.

"Good trip, Cal. Do you want some money for gas?"

"No. But thanks for offering. We should do Lake Palmdale sometime."

I rolled up to the stoplight at the T-intersection of the parking lot and Avenue S. A line of cars raced by. Commuters were wasting no time returning to the new suburbs of Palmdale. They had been hard at work. I had been hard at play. The signal stayed in their favor for several minutes. When it cycled to green, I began pulling out for a left turn, instinctively watching the oncoming traffic. A woman driving a small car was approaching the intersection at high speed. I hesitated. She swerved at the last moment, missing my car by inches. She waved to me as if acknowledging a minor mistake on someone's part.

Life just wouldn't be the same without close calls. 

More LAAS Current Events

Upon checking the masthead in this issue, you might notice that Mary Ferguson has filled the vacant office of 2nd Vice President. We now have a complete Board of Directors.

Per the LAAS by-laws, we are providing notice that the proposed slate of elected officers, for the one year term, commencing July 1, 1998, is identical to the current board. Any member wishing to make a nomination for any office, can do so by notifying Executive Secretary, Millie Newton prior to the May 12, Evening Meeting.

Over the past few months we have lost a few of our key volunteers, but fortunately in each case we've been able to find replacements. Nick Freeman, our long-time Field Trip Chairman, now has a little more time to actually go on those field trips and has left and

has been replaced by Mari Johnson. Lesa Beamer, who did double duty as coordinator of the Armchair Activist as well as designing, implementing and maintaining our webpage, moved to St. Louis. Georgina Polizzi has come forward to fill the Armchair Activist seat and is part of the ad hoc web committee. Finally, Jon Fisher, the voice of the LAAS Bird Hotline, has passed on his role to Raymond Schep. Jon is still a LA Breeding Bird Atlas Regional Coordinator and will probably use his spare time to atlas even more blocks.

We want to thank Nick, Lesa and Jon, for a job well done. Because they have done such a great job, they each will be a tough act to follow. However, we are sure that Mari, Georgina, and Raymond will prove equal to the task.

By the way, we are always looking for volunteers to help in various ways. Right now we have a vacancy for the position of Program Chair.

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CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Let's take a look at the local conservation scene in mid-March 1998:

NEWHALL RANCH: This 12,000 acre property near Magic Mountain is the site of a new city of 70,000 souls that may yet become the Titanic of urban sprawl. Its close neighbor, the city of Santa Clarita, opposes the Ranch as generating impossible traffic and air pollution and paving over magnificent open space. Those who appreciate an untamed river and the wildlife that inhabits its fertile borders are horrified at the prospect of its destruction by 25,000 housing units. The Santa Clara River is the last remaining wild river in Los Angeles County. The Newhall Ranch will build not only homes but also commercial structures in the river's flood plain. Future El Niño rains could be catastrophic.

The opposition of local people and every environmental organization worth its salt has been strong but the County Planning Commission voted unanimously last year to approve the Ranch. By the time this newsletter is read, the moment of truth will have been reached when the County Board of Supervisors will decide whether the Santa Clara River and its wildlife lives or dies.

BIG TUJUNGA WASH: The periodic effort to build a golf course in the rare alluvial sage scrub of the wash of the Big Tujunga River received an apparently lethal blow last year when the Los Angeles City Council voted to deny a permit for the project. The developer immediately sued the city for \$215 million, claiming that their property was being "taken" illegally. Recently the City Attorney agreed to ask the Council to reconsider their vote, as some members appear to be concerned about the cost of the lawsuit and the possibility that the city might lose it. Opponents of the golf course (which include California Fish and Game, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Sierra Club, Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Audubon Societies, a major property owners associations and a local Indian council) must start over, lobbying council members.

In 1994, Cosmo World, then and now the owner of the property, applied for a permit to build a golf course. Because of the state and federally listed endangered Slender-horned Spineflower in the wash, AND the judgement of the Army Corps of Engineers that the golf course would intrude into the waters of the United States, the permit was denied under the federal Clean Air Act. This time around

the developer managed to draft his plans to overcome that defect and the Corps was silent. And then came the El Niño storms that chewed into the banks of the wash. A preliminary survey of the site indicates that if the golf course had been built according to plan, several holes would have vanished under the powerful torrent and that the "waters of the United States" probably would be affected. We await the decision of the Corps.

CHATSWORTH RESERVOIR: This reservoir was built in the 1930s as a source of water to irrigate the citrus groves that flourished in the Valley before the building boom developed. The 1971 Sylmar earthquake was a warning that led to the reservoir's abandonment that converted it into an impromptu wildlife sanctuary. With a generous bird list that includes many uncommon birds, the 1200 acres of open space, though closed to the general public, is open to field trips for school children and organized birders.

Over the years there have been many efforts to buy or lease the land for homes, golf courses and other sports. So far, these efforts have been rejected. The district councilman, Hal Bernson, though a land use conservative, has a special attachment to Chatsworth and has

put through an ordinance declaring it a wildlife preserve.

The reservoir belongs to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which maintains the grounds and supplies water to the wildlife lake. DWP, as most agencies, never has enough money and there have been several recent renewed suggestions for selling the land for development or franchising for profit. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is interested in taking over maintenance but cannot buy the property. Bernson has formed a task force of nearby residents and interested environmental groups but after a burst of energy a year or two ago; little has been accomplished in real life. DWP estimates the land is worth \$75 million and there's little money like that lying around to buy a wildlife preserve no matter how attractive. At the moment there is no visible threat to jeopardize the existence of this remarkable remnant of the Valley's open space, flora and fauna of years ago.

SEPULVEDA BASIN WILDLIFE AREA:

Perhaps we're saving the best for the last.

The Sepulveda Basin is a 2100 acre utilitarian chunk of open space set in Van Nuys in the middle of the San Fernando Valley, population about 1.5 million. Back in the thirties a devastating flood overflowed the banks of the Los Angeles River and wiped out millions of dollars worth of property and over a hundred lives. A dam was built, the river was channelized and Sepulveda became a flood control basin. Decades later, a federal bill was passed permitting, where feasible, recreation activities in federal flood control basins. In Sepulveda the emphasis was on group sports and eventually the basin received baseball fields, ten-

nis courts, cricket fields and three golf courses. There had been agriculture — predominately cornfields — even before the organized sports arrived and Short-eared Owls and hundreds of wintering Canada Geese enjoyed the feeding opportunities.

The Corps of Engineers owns the basin and the City Recreation and Parks maintains it. Tucked away in the master plan was a small enclave labeled "Wildlife Area." Eventually, as more money trickled into the agencies, it was time to create a place for wildlife. An 11 acre lake was dug in the northern section of the area; trees and shrubs were planted. Ducks, herons and other water birds moved in before long and with songbirds and raptors we had a genuine wildlife reserve growing in the middle of Los Angeles. As the years went by, the trees and flowering shrubs grew taller and more beautiful. The reserve began to draw a wide variety of visitors who may not have been interested in birds but enjoyed the green respite from city streets.

Money from two ballot measures led to expansion of the wildlife area; at this writing the work is about to begin. About 100 acres west of the existing reserve will be planted with trees, trails will be built and bridges over the creek will take shape. There will be changes in the "old" existing area with a new parking lot, rest rooms, a center to serve elementary school children in the education program — all of this where the present cricket field lies. The Corps and City Rec and Parks have been very sensitive in making the reserve as true to nature as possible, using only native plants and providing forage for the Canada Geese and ducks. The Sepulveda Wildlife Area! May it last forever! 

Armchair Activist

After reading Sandy's Conservation Conversation column, you might be asking yourself what can I do to help conserve our natural places. Unfortunately, like many of us, you probably don't have a lot of spare time. Well we have the perfect answer for you: The Armchair Activist. The Armchair Activist is a National Audubon Society monthly newsletter, produced in coordination with Audubon chapters throughout the country.

Each month a single issue is raised and information about that issue is presented. Finally, a sample letter is provided to help you write to the appropriate person or agency. You write the letter and you've done your part for the month.

To be added to the mailing list to receive your Armchair Activist, Letter of the Month Club newsletter, contact Georgina Polizzi through LAAS Headquarters (213) 876-0202 or e-mail: gpolizz@wssib.com

If you correctly identified the breeding species distribution map on page 2 as being the Los Angeles Head Shrike call (213) 745-2473 to claim your prize.

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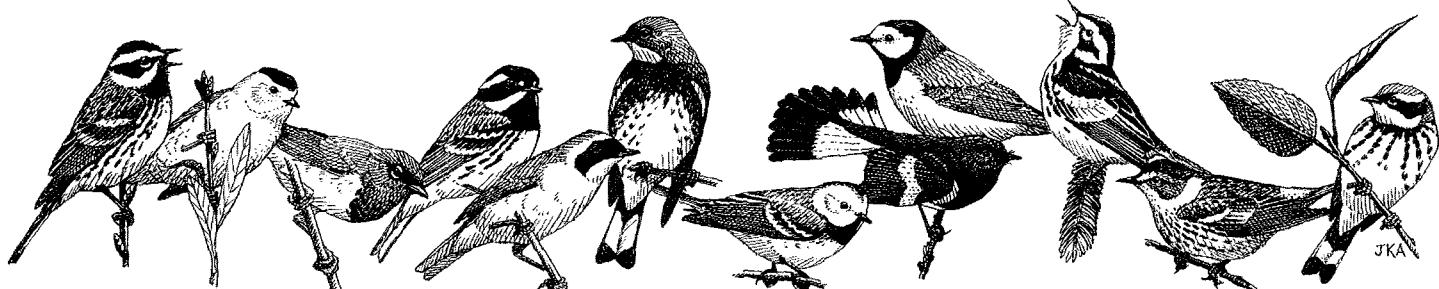
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BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Kimball L. Garrett

With only two field seasons left for the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas, I'll stifle any urge to extol the virtues of May and June for watching spring migrants. Yes, warblers, tanagers, flycatchers and other migrants will be streaming through the deserts and wooded coastal canyons in May. Sometimes there are even surprising numbers of such migrants in the coniferous zones of the mountains in late April and May, even though the prevailing dogma suggests that such a route is mainly reserved for "fall" (mostly meaning August through September). And yes, there will be "vagrants" at well-worked desert oases and a few other, more surprising spots. But the real attraction of the late spring and early summer period is the opportunity to get lots of "bang" for your atlasing buck. Montane species and many long-distance migrant songbirds will be in the full swing of nesting — feeding young or tending recently fledged young. Many resident species and lowland breeders will have fledged young or even be working on second or third broods. You should already have been atlasing for a couple of months in 1998 as you read this, but latecomers can also contribute greatly — please call Atlas Central at (213) 745-2473, and don't forget to send in those Casual Observation Forms for any bird breeding activity that you observe.

Long rainy periods in February caused many to do most of their birding on the Internet — and in winter Internet discussions

inevitably turn to gulls. Gulls are relatively easily observed, allowing detailed analysis of such "fine points" as primary tip pattern, orbital ring color, tertial and covert patterns, etc. Gulls also include species or close species groups which are exceedingly variable geographically (the Herring Gull, for example). Add to this the confounding influences of slow plumage maturation, striking individual variation within many species, hybridization, and so forth, and there is no end to debate and discussion. Furthermore, with several web sites showing dozens of photos of "known" and "unknown" individual

gulls, as well as Jon Dunn's excellent new gull identification video, the stage has been set for expectation and discovery. Fortunately, some intrepid observers actually got out into the field to look at real, live gulls, and the results from late January and February were spectacular. At least four, and possibly five **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were present at the Salton Sea, in addition to the returning bird at Doheny State Beach in Orange Co. Perhaps the most widely seen was the adult mentioned in the last *Tanager* which was found by Dharm Pellegrini at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area on 21 January and present for a couple of weeks. Michael Patten's experience and patience allowed him to extract a first winter Lesser Black-back from a horde of variable Herring Gulls (along with Thayer's, Glaucous-winged, Yellow-footed, Heermann's, etc.) at Obsidian Butte near the south end of the Salton Sea on 24 January; it was seen by numerous observers for about a month. Birders should take note that the Imperial Irrigation District has closed Obsidian Butte to vehicle access, ostensibly to protect the large numbers of Brown Pelicans, a few of which have displayed potential nesting behavior.

Patten, along with Matt Heindel, Guy McCaskie and Curtis Marantz, found California's first well-documented and unequivocal **Slaty-backed Gull**, a fourth-winter bird at Salton City on 21 February; it, too, was in with a large number of Herring Gulls and was only seen a couple of times after its discovery.

Records of rare and unusual bird sightings reported in this column should be considered tentative pending review by the regional editors of *American Birding Association FIELD NOTES* or, if appropriate, by the **California Birds Records Committee**.

Send your bird observations with as many details as possible to:

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The address for submissions to the California Bird Records Committee is:

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Heindel's photos appear to clinch this difficult identification.

Coastally, it was a very different kind of gull that caught the attention of birders. **Black-legged Kittiwakes** have been scarce or virtually absent in the region most recent winters, so a mini-“invasion” in March was of great interest. Kittiwakes were scattered along the coast at places like Ballona Creek, Malibu Lagoon, and Huntington Beach, with both adults and immatures represented. In what might be a related development, several **Ancient Murrelets** were seen off Pt. Vicente on the Palos Verdes Peninsula and off Pt. Dume in Malibu in mid-March (Mike San Miguel). Many northern seabirds are best found in the region in late winter and spring, undoubtedly due to prevailing oceanographic conditions.

Black Skimmers were found along Ballona Creek in unprecedented numbers (up to 40 birds) in early March (Richard Barth); these may have been wintering birds from Santa Barbara returning south to Bolsa Chica, San Diego Bay, or other breeding areas, or might even represent a northward push of this pioneering species. A few skimmers were also found in

February and March at Malibu Lagoon. The large wintering flock in Long Beach has been displaced from the Shoreline Park area by construction of the new aquarium, but was present along the beach north of the Belmont Pier in numbers up to about 175 in February. Observers are reminded to carefully scrutinize skimmers for color and alphanumeric leg bands; report the exact color combinations and/or letters and numbers to Kathy Molina here to the Natural History Museum (kmolina@bcf.usc.edu) or to Dr. Charles Collins at California State University at Long Beach.

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue their expansion in the region; they are now found in scattered populations from Port Hueneme to Cambria, and a sighting of two birds at a ranch yard east of Lancaster on 15 March (Kimball Garrett) suggests that colonization of the interior of southern California is at hand.

A male **Painted Bunting** at a feeder in Eagle Rock from late February to early March (*fide* Raymond Schep) is perhaps best treated as an escapee, although natural vagrants of this species do occur in California. Painted Buntings are not legally held in captivity in the

United States, but we know of one recent instance of a Los Angeles pet store offering several for sale. Robb Hamilton is currently developing a review of all Painted Bunting records in California, including sightings of birds in captivity and obvious escapees as well as birds thought to be wild; any information bearing on this issue can be sent to Robb directly or through me.

Spring migrants appeared to be trickling in on schedule in March, with early migrants and summering birds (including Rufous Hummingbirds, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Warbling Vireos, and Bullock's, Hooded and Scott's Orioles) in all the expected places. Quite early was a **Solitary Sandpiper** in the Big Santa Anita debris basin on 24 March (Mike San Miguel). Among the more notable land bird sightings in Los Angeles County in February was a **Brown Thrasher** at the well-worked El Dorado Nature Center on 22 February (David Rice). Finally, a **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** along the Santa Clara River in Acton on 24 February (Mickey Long), was at an unusual coastal slope location, though only about 8 miles outside of its known range in the Palmdale area. 

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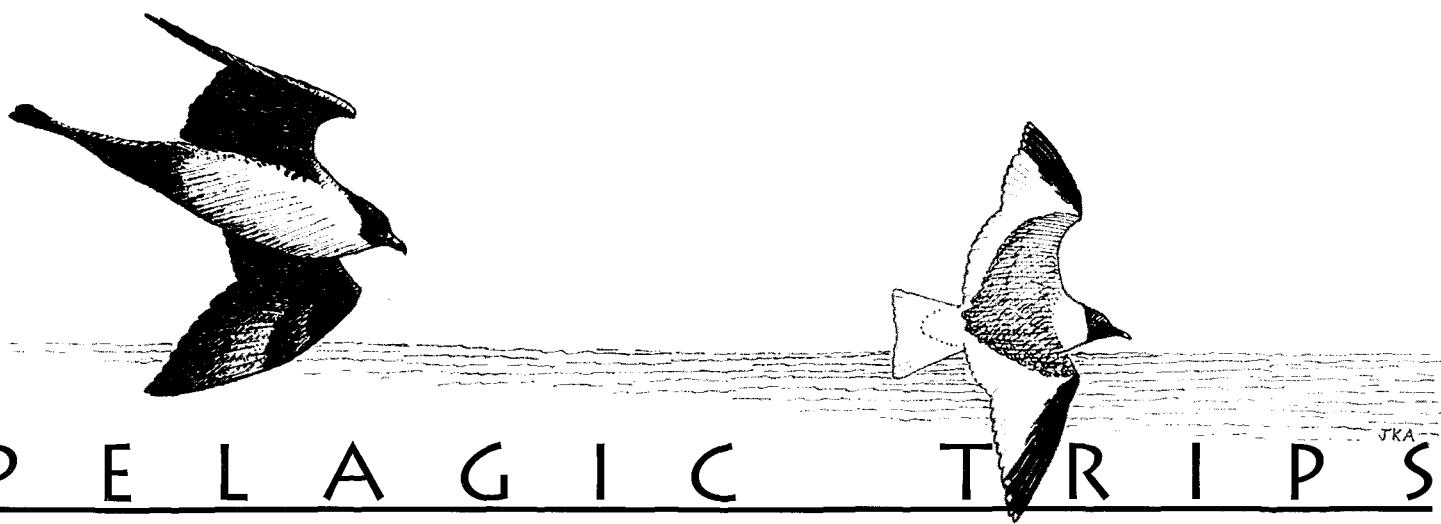
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Birdlife International 1997

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PELAGIC TRIPS

JKA

Pelagic species often seen are Pink-footed, Sooty, Short-tailed, and Black-vented Shearwaters, Red Phalarope, Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, 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 Bottle-nosed, Common and Risso's Dolphins.

Saturday, May 9 —

Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Banks. This 12-hour trip departs from San Pedro. Spring cruise with birding to the island to search for nesting Xantus' Murrelets, Pigeon Guillemots, Brown Pelicans, cormorants (3), and west coast gulls. Return by Osborne Banks. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mike San Miguel. \$45 bring your own food. Coffee and tea supplied.

Sunday, June 14 —

Santa Cruz Island with landing at **Prisoners Cove**. This 10-hour trip departs Ventura. This beautiful island is the largest and most varied of the Channel Islands. We will take a short walk with a Nature Conservancy naturalist to see the flora and fauna as we search for the Island Scrub-Jay. We will then cruise off the island for pelagic species. Leaders: Herb and Olga Clarke. \$60, full galley.

Saturday, August 22 —

Albatross Knoll via San Nicolas Island. 20-hour trip departs from San Pedro. Early A.M. departure past San Nicolas Island to Potato Banks and Albatross Knoll. Exciting birds and sea mammals seen on previous August trips. Many of the same birds and mammals as local trips, with a greater chance for rarities. Possible Red-billed Tropicbird, Long-tailed Jaeger, South Polar Skua, and Blue Whales. Leaders: Kimball Garrett, Mike San Miguel and Mitch Heindel. \$130 includes 3 meals.

All pelagic trips must be filled 35 days prior to sailing, so please make your reservations early.

REFUND POLICY FOR PELAGIC TRIPS

If 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 fewer 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.

Sunday, September 20 —

Anacapa Island, Santa Rosa Island, and Santa Cruz Island. 12-hour trip departs from Ventura. Birds all the way highlight this beautiful passage between the islands. Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Mike San Miguel. \$70, full galley.

Saturday, October 17 —

Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Banks. 12-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey. Joint trip with the UCLA Biology Department. We will head out to the open ocean toward Santa Barbara Island as we search for pelagic birds and marine life, Leaders: Arnold Small, Fritz Hertel, and Barney Schlinger. \$45 (\$40 students), microwave only.

Saturday, November 14 —

Palos Verdes Escarpment to Redondo Canyon. 8-hour trip departs from San Pedro. This trip is tailored to novice pelagic birders and year-end listers. Leaders: Mitch Heindel, Kimball Garrett, and Kathy Molina. \$30 no galley.



FIELD TRIPS

Continued from page 12

Sunday, May 10 —

Atlasing in Green Valley Leader **Robert Weissler**. Last year the surrounding area yielded nesting Mountain Bluebirds and Tricolored Blackbirds. This area has Coast Liveoak, chaparral, and cottonwood riparian habitats. From L.A. take Hwy. 14, exit at San Fernando Rd. Go N, turn left on Seco Canyon Rd., go to San Francisquito Canyon Rd. and turn left. Continue on this road 1fi miles past Spunky Canyon Rd. to Green Valley Ranger station on the left (Thomas Guide 4192, F1). Meet in parking lot at 8:00 A.M. Bring lunch and hiking shoes for moderate climbing.

Sunday, May 10 —

Whittier Narrows. Leader: **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. to view colorful resident and migrating birds including Northern Cardinal. Take 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 donation.

Saturday, May 16 —

Atlasing in Soledad Canyon. **Kimball Garrett** will lead us to an area which last year had breeding Willow Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers. This area is mostly riparian woodland and can be birded close to the road. Meet at 7:00 A.M. Take Hwy. 14 to Soledad Canyon Rd. (the exit after Sand Canyon). Go 3fi miles E to the junction of Soledad Canyon Rd. and Agua Dulce Canyon Rd. For those who are late, we will continue birding along Soledad Canyon Rd.

Sunday, May 31 — Santa Anita Canyon with Raymond Schep.

Take the 210 Fwy towards Arcadia, and take Santa Anita Ave. N to the parking lot at the very end of the road. Meet at the trailhead at the bottom of the lot. 4 mile route moderately strenuous walk through oak and chaparral canyons. Olive-sided Flycatcher, Band-tailed Pigeon,

three hummers and Dipper possible. Pack a lunch. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, June 7 —

Topanga State Park with **Gerry Haigh**. See May 3.

Sunday, June 14 —

Whittier Narrows with **Ray Jillson** See May 10.

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.

species such as crossbills and nuthatches. Meet at 7:30 A.M. on Hwy 2 in La Canada, just north of the 210 Fwy. This will give people the opportunity to carpool. Bring jacket, hat, lunch, fluids and insect repellent. The group will bird till lunch and then willing parties can continue until 3 P.M.

Sunday, July 5 —

Topanga State Park with **Gerry Haigh**.

See May 3 write up.

Sunday, July 12 —

Whittier Narrows with **Ray Jillson**. See May 10 write-up.

Saturday through Monday,

July 18-20 — Yosemite and

Mono Lake

Leader **David Yee**. Blue Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak, and Pinyon Jay are likely. Fee of \$22 for Saturday and Sunday, \$11 for optional day Monday to Owens Valley and Mono Lake.

Have reservations in Oakhurst for Friday, July 17 and Saturday, July 18. Limited to 14 participants.

Reserve with SASE and reservation fee to LAAS to receive info/motel flyer. Your name and phone number will be available to carpoolers unless you request otherwise. serve your motel rooms early.



Upcoming Event:

Sunday, September 27 —

Sparrow Workshop. **Jon Dunn** and **Kimball Garrett**. Although no sparrow field guide is planned, these two masters of field I.D. will make identification and appreciation of this large group of similar-looking birds easier. Material will be balanced to address some technical topics without alienating intermediate birders. Time will be afternoon/evening and will be listed in the next issue of the *Tanager*. \$25 fee. Location — Braun Auditorium, Huntington Memorial Hospital, 100 W. Congress Ave., Pasadena. Send SASE to LAAS for details.

EVENING MEETINGS

Meet at 7:30 P.M. in Plummer Park.
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

Tuesday, May 12, 1998

"Nature Tourism in Latin America"

Brett Jenks, Director of the Nature Guide Training Program for the RARE Center for Tropical Conservation will present a slide illustrated look into his work in Costa Rica, Honduras, Baja California and the Yucatan Peninsula training local people to take advantage of the growing nature tourism industry, which, in-turn promotes local conservation efforts.

Tuesday, June 9, 1998

"Birding the Salton Sea"

Herb Clarke, preeminent bird photographer and regular speaker at the LAAS, will present a slide illustrated talk taking us on a trip around the one of the premier birding locations in the U.S., the Salton Sea. On the way we will see many of the bird species which make this area famous.

F I E L D T R I P S

Before setting out on any field trip, please call the LAAS bird tape at (213) 874-1318 for special instructions or possible cancellations that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip.

Sunday, May 3 — Topanga State Park with Gerry Haigh. This is a diverse coastal mountain area. An ideal trip for a beginning birder or someone new to the area. A botanist is often present. From Ventura Blvd., take Topanga Canyon Blvd,

7 miles S, turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Follow the signs and turn left into the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$6 parking fee. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, May 3 — Morongo Valley: Birds and Herps. LA Zoo herpetologist and LAAS member **Harvey Fischer** will lead as we bird the renowned desert oasis in Morongo. When it warms up, we will proceed to sites selected by Harvey to look for lizards. Meet in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve park-

ing lot at 8:00 A.M. Take 10 Fwy. E past Beaumont, turn N on State Rt. 62 to Morongo Valley. Turn right on East Drive across from Rocky's Pizza. Take the first driveway left into the lot. About a 2 hr. drive from L.A. Anticipate heat, hunger, thirst, and rock-hopping.

Saturday, May 9 — Galileo Hills. Leader **Nick Freeman**. We will ogle brightly colored warblers and probably Chukar but will give particular scrutiny to tyrant flycatchers, which peak at this time. Take Hwy. 14, continue N past Mojave about 10 miles, then turn right on California City Blvd. Go under the bridge past Conklin and park in the golf course lot on the left side of the street. About two hours driving time from L.A. Limited sign-up of 15 participants. Call LAAS to register. Bring lunch and sunblock. Your name and phone number will be available to carpool unless you request otherwise.

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