

WESTERN TANAGER

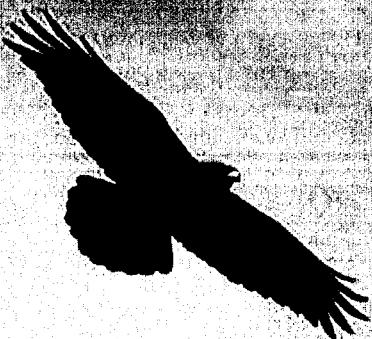


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Los Angeles Audubon Society

Neither rain, nor snow, nor wild... .

By Fred Heath



Common Raven: poster bird of the Lancaster CBC.

Photo by Brian Small

On December 19 of this year, I will be compiling my 20th and final Lancaster Christmas Bird Count. As a birder from New York City, Christmas Counts only felt right in the freezing cold. One had to suffer for those good birds. Because the Antelope Valley meets that criterion, it is almost the perfect place for a Christmas Count, unlike many of the more coastal counts in southern California in the which the weather can be downright balmy. It seems odd to be writing about cold Christmas Bird Counts as I sit here in late July with local temperatures setting records over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. However, after 19 years of doing the Lancaster count, the data begin to show some interesting trends. Some are obvious and reflect well-known bird population dynamics, others show the changes

which are a result of the growth and development in Lancaster, and still others for which no reason seems apparent to my untrained eye. Over this and the next issue of *Western Tanager*, I would like to share the knowledge as well as the unanswered questions from 19 years of the Lancaster CBC.

GENESIS

In November of 1977, Tom Frillman and I, in preparation for a Los Angeles County Big Year in 1978, were poking around the far reaches of L.A. County when we "discovered" the Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base. Just prior to stumbling on the ponds themselves, we found a Verdin in a small tamarisk grove. This, in itself, was pretty exciting, as it was the first record of Verdin in L.A. County. As

it later turned out, Verdin is a regular breeder, especially in the east end of the Antelope Valley. However, in 1977, only a few birders such as Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett spent any time at all in the Antelope Valley and that was mainly in the fall searching the agricultural fields in the west end of the valley for longspurs. To come upon these vast ponds filled with ducks and herons and even Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the middle of the arid salt brush/Joshua Tree landscape was stunning. And throughout 1978, we returned again and again to this area that had birds which were hard to find anywhere else in L.A. County. Of course we shared our discovery with our birding friends and this area specifically, as well as other spots throughout the Antelope Valley, began to get more and more coverage. In 1979, Kimball Garrett came up with the idea of a bunch of us covering the Antelope Valley in a single day in a kind of informal Christmas Count format to see how many species we could find. About a dozen of us fanned out across the valley on the third weekend in October, which was just before hunting season. Kimball, never missing the opportunity for a good pun, named it the "Last Blast!" Although the weather was awful with freezing rain being blown horizontally by the 30-40-mph winds (a mighty "Last Blast") and large whitecaps and waves on the Lancaster sewage ponds, we managed to record well over 100 species. Some of us, still gluttons for punishment, decided to do a real Christmas Bird Count in the Antelope Valley that year. Since

Kimball was already co-compiling the Malibu Count with Jean Brandt, I got talked into becoming the compiler for this first effort. Unlike the "Last Blast", we had to limit our count to the standard 15-mile diameter circle. By playing with my compass on an Automobile Club map, I was able to find a circle which included all of the Piute Ponds and a chunk of the Rosamond Lake bed in L.A. County, the Lancaster sewage ponds, Apollo Park, a corner of Quartz Hill, the Antelope Valley Country Club golf course, the sod fields at the southeast corner of Palmdale Airport, lots of good alfalfa fields to 90th Street East, the little wooded community behind the Glendale Auto Parts junkyard off 90th and finally all of fast growing Lancaster itself. We talked 11 brave souls into participating that first year and reached 99 species, as late in the day Tom Frillman found the only American Tree Sparrow we have ever had on the count. Then, as the sun was heading for the horizon, Tom noticed a few birds which we thought might be our only gulls of the day, but which turned out to be a group of 15 White-tailed Kites heading for an *Arundo Donax* grove in the middle of an otherwise empty field.



Eared Grebe or emaciated penguin?

Photo by Brian Small

WEATHER

In the introduction to this article, I mentioned I liked my Christmas Counts cold. Since the temperature at dawn on most of the 19 counts was in the high teens to low twenty-

ties, there was no doubt it was winter. However, the air at dawn was usually still and if you were dressed for it, these cold temperatures were no real problem. The real problem is WIND. The folks in the Antelope Valley actually celebrate it during the Annual Wind Festival which runs about 365 days every year, roughly from January 1st to December 31st. Most days, the wind waits until noon before blowing us away. In the summer, the wind is a mixed blessing—while it may help cool you slightly it is more like dry-roasting. But in the winter the wind-chill factor can make you so cold that think

you might be in the Antarctic and that Eared Grebe you are looking at might really be an emaciated penguin. Birding is difficult—with your scope shaking, dirt blowing, eyes tearing, and birds curled up into unrecognizable blobs. Interestingly enough, at the very end of the day, the wind seems to tire and usually becomes dead calm.

Luckily, precipitation has never been a problem. It rained once and that was a single cloud which dumped a freezing rain and snow on only my party in the Antelope Valley CC before it dissipated. However, now that I've written this, you can bet we will have continuous rain on the count this year.

NUMBERS

One of the nice things about computers is that one can gather lots of data and actually do something with them. Over the years,

I've used a standard spreadsheet program (first Lotus and now Excel) to keep all the Lancaster CBC data neatly arranged. This allows me to look at trends, note interesting patterns of occurrence, compute averages, and generally see the bigger picture at a glance. Before getting into the discussion of



Over 76,000 Horned Larks were counted in 1981.

Photo by Brian Small

specific species and groups of birds, which will be covered in Part II in the next issue of *Western Tanager*, a few overall numbers might be of interest.

In the 19 years of this count we managed to find 191 species and an additional nine subspecies or forms for a total of 200 birds. We've averaged just under 108 full species each year with a low of 96 and a high of 118. The number of observers has averaged just over 19 intrepid folks with a low of 10 and a high of 31 (we had 31 people two years in a row in the early eighties!) The total number of individual birds averages close to 46,000, ranging from 15,619 to 110,546. Most of the higher counts were early in the 19 years with the last count that was higher than the average taking place in 1985. 

To be continued in the next *Western Tanager*.

Birds of the Earth

A Status Report for Earth Day 1998

by Hartmut S. Walter

Birders of the Earth: be proud and concerned at the same time! Proud because the efforts of thousands of birders and professional ornithologists have produced another milestone in conservation science. Concerned because 2,561 bird species have restricted breeding ranges and 816 of these species (74% of all threatened bird species) have been classified as threatened. Where does this information come from? For the last ten years, BirdLife International in Cambridge, UK, (the former ICBP or International Council for Bird Preservation) has run its ambitious Biodiversity Program. The Program has developed a huge database of bird observations from around the world and mapped bird distribution ranges in order to identify priority areas for conservation.

Without the vast number of knowledgeable amateur bird watchers, it would have been impossible to gather such a well-documented analysis of most species' range, abundance, habitat and food preferences, and threats to their survival. Birds are, by far, the best known large group of animals. Does that surprise you? They are easy to find (compared to most nocturnal creatures), many of them sing, are highly mobile, have interesting lives, experience the landscape much as humans do, and offer highly esthetic images. No wonder then that we have millions of bird enthusiasts on all continents (and most islands as well); many submit their bird data to bird atlas compilers and bird records committees. Ecotourism, computerization, and the Internet have led to a further improvement in updating distribution records. I wish that we had more enthusiasts for herbs, mammals, and plants such as grasses, but we don't and this is why our knowledge of most

other organisms is quite poor at present.

Since many birds species are sensitive to changes in the availability of their favorite food items and breeding or wintering habitats they serve as excellent indicators of environmental change. Thus range contractions and/or a decline in abundance may indicate habitat loss and resource degradation. A global effort to assess the status of birds with restricted range is an important step in recognizing relatively small geographic areas containing bird species found nowhere else. BirdLife International's Program on Biodiversity has now completed its project with the publication of *Endemic Bird Areas of the World: Priorities for Biodiversity Conservation* (1998, BirdLife International, Cambridge, ISBN 0946888 33 7).

In order to figure out what birds can tell us about conservation priorities, we have to endure some numbers and definitions. Currently, we estimate that some 9,700 bird species live on Earth. This is a useful approximate number, although taxonomic reforms and new discoveries may modify this figure slightly in the near future. It has also been estimated that there are some 300 billion individual birds. Since Earth has a surface area of some 510 million sq. km with 29.4% of it land, there is approximately one bird for every 500 sq. meters of land (an area 73 feet square). This would be equivalent to 20 birds per hectare or roughly eight birds per acre. We appear to have a lot of birds to watch but there are thousands of bird species that occur only in unusually difficult to reach and highly restricted areas. These species were the target of the BirdLife project.

A restricted-range bird species is defined as a landbird occupying a breeding range of less than 50,000 sq. km throughout historical time (since 1800). Exactly 2,623 landbirds qualified for this designation; that is 28% of landbirds and 27% of all birds. 53% live on islands and 47% on continents. Of the island species, 69% are restricted to

oceanic islands. Most restricted-range birds live in forests (71%) and more than 50% of them are classified as threatened or near threatened. The major threats affecting this group of birds are habitat loss or alteration (54%) and small range or population (27%).

An endemic bird area (EBA) is recognized if at least two restricted-range species have overlapping ranges that can be delimited by geographic boundaries (coastlines), habitat requirements, and altitudinal ranges of each species. A total of 218 EBAs have been identified, scattered around the world but concentrated in the tropical latitudes (77%). Of the 113 continental EBAs, 42% are largely in montane areas above 1000 m. Of the 105 island EBAs, 73 are on oceanic islands. Many EBAs harbor not just endemic species but endemic bird genera as well. The two EBAs with most of the latter are Sulawesi and the Atlantic forest lowlands of Brazil with 12 and 10 endemic genera respectively. Some 25 EBAs have from 62 to 21 restricted-range species that are confined (endemic) to an EBA. The highest rankings go to the Solomon Islands group (62 species), Atlantic forest lowlands of Brazil (52), Chocó (51), Costa Rica and Panama highlands (49), and the Tumbesian region of west Ecuador and northwest Peru (45).

How threatened are the EBAs? Most have already lost more than half of their key habitats and have threatened or extinct restricted-range species. Some 11% have suffered severe (>90%) habitat loss, and 72% have registered major or moderate habitat loss. The lowland evergreen forest landscape of the Atlantic slope of Alagoas and Pernambuco in northeast Brazil (EBA 071) has been deforested to such an extent that only 2–6% of it remains in fragmented blocks totaling only 878 sq.. km. Of its 13 restricted-range species, one is already extinct in the wild (Alagoas Curassow, *Mitu mitu*), three have been classified as belonging to the critical, three to the endangered, and six to the vulnerable extinction category

established by the International Conservation Union.

Which countries contain the highest number of EBAs? The five leading countries are Indonesia (24), Mexico (18), Peru (11), Brazil (10), and Colombia (9). The four authors of this massive report (Alison J. Stattersfield, Michael J. Crosby, Adrian J. Long, and David C. Wege) also attempted to prioritize the 218 EBAs for conservation purposes. Each EBA is ranked by its biological importance (number of restricted-range species, taxonomic uniqueness of these species, and size of the EBA) and its current threat level (% of threatened restricted-range species and categories of threat). Most of the areas receiving the highest priority ranking lie in the tropics and have been relatively poorly surveyed. There is still a lot of work to do there for ornithologists of all kinds.

What is the conservation relevance of the EBAs? It is definitely of the highest relevance for regional bird conservation, particularly for tropical montane habitats, and for islands. The book contains numerous unusually detailed maps of the remotest places on Earth, definitely a record for a bird book. The reader comes away with a new awareness of how many birds are in danger of extinction in different parts of the world. In many areas it will be a monumental task to stop the extinction process. This database, however, pinpoints for the first time where these areas are and what the major conservation problems are. This is a great step forward in bird conservation!

The congruence or overlap of the EBAs with other biodiversity centers or hot spots is less clear. Science is providing an increasingly complex picture of regional and global biodiversity. The African EBAs were not necessarily in the same zones where Afrotropical mammal conservation is a priority. Also, some 70% of Centers of Plant Diversity (CPD) overlapped in some degree with EBAs but only about 10% of CPDs and EBAs match each other. The mapping of

ecoregions of South America also varied significantly from the delineation of most EBAs. This can largely be explained by the frequent use of more than one habitat or altitudinal zone by many bird species. Biodiversity then, is more than just bird diversity. But without our knowledge of birds, how would we know that?

In terms of regional prioritization, none of the EBAs are in Europe or northern Asia. The only three EBAs in North America are in California (chaparral and mixed woodland), central and southern Baja California, and Guadalupe Island. South America, with roughly 3,200 bird species, the richest continental avifauna, also contains the highest number of restricted-range species (658) of all the regions in the study. This is followed by the southeast Asian islands, New Guinea, and Australia region with 636 restricted-range species. If we want to prevent any further extinctions, conservation-minded birders have their work cut out in these tropical regions!

Finally, how can this valuable documentation improve the conservation status of birds in general? There are many actions and ways to promote bird conservation. In the wake of the Biodiversity Convention (Rio 1992), it was decided to develop a Biodiversity Conservation Information System (BCIS) to improve communication between data-owners, governments, and conservation organizations. The

EBA dataset should become an important element of this system.

BirdLife International has adopted EBAs as one of the targets of its Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program. The function of this program is to identify and protect a network of sites that are critical for the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations. A total of 2,444 IBAs have already been selected in Europe, 391 in the Middle East, and some 596 'Key Areas' for threatened species have been selected in the neotropics. Soon, such IBAs will also be adopted in North America and in the remaining regions.

Location matters, as all geographers preach. In this case, it is gratifying that the major focus of this complicated dataset is the documentation of the natural and human landscape parameters present in the EBAs. They provide, after all, the totality of all resources sustaining the restricted-range species. More often than not, it is the disturbance, loss, and interference with these spatial resources that has created and contributed to the extinction threat faced by restricted-range species. Thus, while we must continue to learn more about the birds themselves it should be imperative to also study and address the habitat and resource-related problems that constitute the major extinction risk to the survival of restricted-range birds everywhere. Long live the birds of this Earth! 

We regret to announce the recent death of Henry Childs. A California birder for over 60 years, Hank received his Doctorate in Zoology from the University of California at Berkeley and was an Emeritus Professor of Biology at Chaffey College in Alta Loma. He taught birding classes at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont. He published papers in *Evolution*, *The Condor*, the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, *Journal of Mammalogy* and will be remembered by *Western Tanager* readers for the many articles he wrote with a twinkle in his pen. He was also the author of *Where Birders Go In Southern California* which was published by the Los Angeles Audubon Society. He will be sorely missed.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Conservation notes in mid-July 1998

Protection of the environment is still high on the priority list of the majority of the American people, yet the Republican Congress, representing big grazers, big miners, big agribusiness and big loggers, is determined to subvert existing curbs on the insatiable appetites of its sponsors. An editorial in the *Tampa Tribune*, "CONGRESS BUSHWHACKS ENVIRONMENT", said, "Legislation to fund the Department of the Interior has been transformed into a congressional slash-and-burn horror show. Riders attached to appropriation bills...would rob Americans of public land, require taxpayers to subsidize select businesses and gut environmental regulations." Several newspapers nationwide, including the *Denver Post* and the *Washington Post* condemned the infamous riders. The *Charleston (WV) Gazette* said "...the Republicans are ashamed of their environmental agenda and want to hide it..." in legislative riders attached to unrelated bills. It remains to be seen if this sneaky tactic will succeed or backfire.

E.O. Wilson of Harvard University is no ivory tower academic. World authority on ants, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, eloquent advocate of biodiversity, Wilson is not content to sit behind his hand lens all day. As spokesman for a group of

100 scientists, he has warned the Administration that over-logging in the southeastern forests may destroy one of the richest temperate forests on earth. Wilson's group says that the proliferation of wood chip mills is at fault. They are calling for a moratorium on permits until a study is made of the impacts of logging and the mills. Wilson said, "...I am...concerned that our natural areas be recognized for their full value and protected...for the sake of future generations."

The National Park Service says it will ban personal watercraft such as jet skis from all national parks including nine where they are presently permitted. They would be allowed on 11 national recreation areas and two national seashores. Personal watercraft, the Service says, are "often operated in an

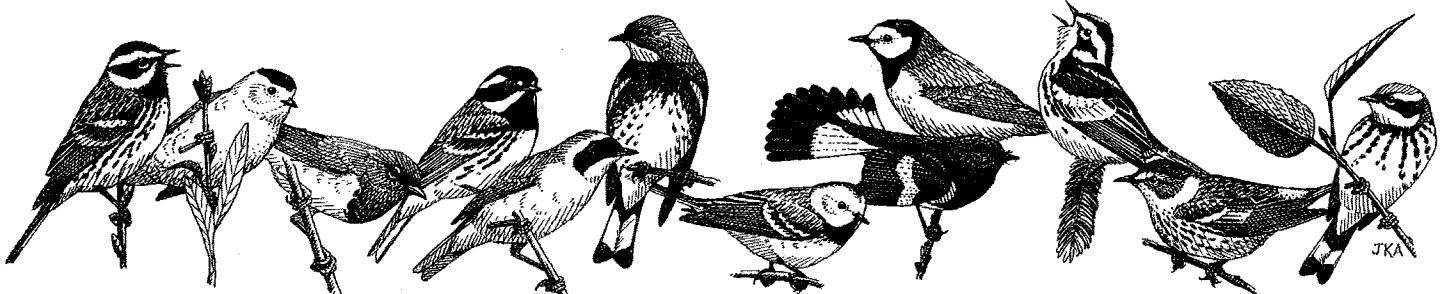
aggressive manner," leak oil and gas and cause frequent complaints about noise and unsafe operation.

Locally, several environmental organizations and three Los Angeles City Councilmembers have written to the supervisor of the Angeles National Forest asking him to request funds from the Congressional Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire Tujunga Wash. If a desirable property exists within five miles of a national forest, that would merit the protection of the forest on environmental grounds, forest park supervisor is permitted to make the request. Congress has drastically cut back funding for the LWCF and the paperwork for the request is so complicated that the current supervisor is not optimistic about the chances for success. The future of the Wash is still clouded. 

The UCLA Extension course, *Field Studies of California Birds*, is again being offered by Arnold Small during the fall quarter at UCLA. The course runs from October to December 1998 and includes five class meetings (Weds. 7-9:30 PM at UCLA) and three all-day Saturday field trips to a variety of local birding habitats from shore to mountains. University credit is offered. The class emphasizes developing birding skills and recent developments in taxonomy, ecology, behavior and distribution of California birds.

Herb and Olga Clarke will assist on the field trips. This course, which has been running for more than 20 years, provides opportunities for learning for birders from the beginner to the advanced level.

Call UCLA Extension at (310) 825-7093 and ask for Gina Springer or Karen Prinzmetal for details and a UCLA Extension catalog. Or call Arnold Small at (310) 275-8823 for more information.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Mike San Miguel

With Kimball gallivanting around the rain forests of the Peruvian Amazon until mid-August, Fred Heath asked me to pinch-hit for this version of the Birds of the Season. So, for better or worse, here it is.

Except for a few impressively large snow packs at the upper elevations of Mt. Baldy, Mt. San Gorgonio and Mt. San Jacinto (unusual for this late into the summer) at long last we can finally bid farewell to El Niño, that over-exposed and media abused-phenomenon. It remains to be seen what sub-equatorial seabirds may find there way into the waters of California as a result of impacts of El Niño. Undeniably though, the best bird of the summer season in Southern California was the **Bridled Tern** found at Bolsa Chica on 17 July by Marshall Iliff from Maryland. A handful of fortunate birders saw the bird late that evening but throngs of birders from all parts of the state were disappointed the following day when the bird failed to reappear. If approved by the California Bird Records Committee this would be the first Bridled Tern for the State.

While there appear to be a few exceptions, the breeding season seems to be pretty much on track this year except at the upper elevations of our local mountains where the snow hasn't quite given ground to the blazing summer sun. There were also some signs that the high desert breeding season may have

been a bit late this year because of a cool spring. As evidence, on 14 June Mike San Miguel found a juvenile **LeConte's Thrasher** at Avenue A and the Shuttle Road on Edwards Air Force Base (EAFB). Normally they have completed their first pre-basic molt by mid-April. The fourth field season of the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas is about to conclude and efforts by the many hard working volunteers continue to turn up some surprises including more new

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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or call:

Raymond Schep (310) 278-6244
e-mail: drschep@colonial-dames.com

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

Michael M. Rogers, Secretary
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P.O. Box 340
Moffett Field, CA 94035-0340
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breeding firsts for the County. On 3 July a **Cattle Egret** (Bruce Broadbooks, MSM) was observed carrying nesting material into the Black-crowned Night-Heron nesting colony at Piute Ponds at EAFB, and on 17 July three nests, each with two downy chicks were discovered. It was only a matter of time before they began to establish a resident breeding population in the County and perhaps that time has arrived. Two juvenile **Vermilion Flycatchers** (MSM) were observed chasing and begging for food from an obliging adult male in cottonwood trees at the ranch yard at Avenue B and 30th Street West in the Antelope Valley on 12 July for another County breeding first.

As always, the Salton Sea continues this season to be one of the best birding locations in California — if not in North America. On 4 July Guy McCaskie first reported seven **Magnificent Frigatebirds** at the Salton Sea and they continue to make an impressive showing in much of California, with as many as **16** there on 6 July; two in Santa Barbara in early July; one at Bolsa Chica on 1 July (Karen Gilbert). Up to three frigatebirds were seen in Los Angeles County on 18 July, with two in San Pedro harbor and one at the mouth of Alamitos Channel in Long Beach. Impressive inland sightings at Tinemaha Reservoir and later at Diaz Lake near Lone Pine (Matt Heindel) and at Mono Lake at the same time and date, were especially notable. These

and other scattered sightings along the coast as far north as Bodega Head on 20 July indicated a widespread invasion of this showy species this summer.

While returning from a week-long pelagic trip, Peter Cantle found a **Black-footed Albatross** at Redondo Canyon two miles from Point Vicente on 24 May. A **pterodroma** (GMc) seen from the south end of Colfax Street at the north end of the Salton Sea was too distant and backlit against the sun to allow for a positive identification but was flying like a Cook's Petrel. Also at Colfax St., a **Neotropical Cormorant** (GMc) found on 4 July was still present on 16 July. Three **Reddish Egrets** at Bolsa Chica on 13 June were found by Kurt Johnson and seen by a few others later that day but were gone by late afternoon; another was seen by Ryan Chornock at the end of Colfax Street at the north end of the Salton Sea on 20 July. On 28 June 11 **Brant** were seen at Malibu Lagoon (Tom Wurster and KaG) and about 20 of them were scattered around the Salton Sea. A sub-adult **Mississippi Kite** was found at Furnace Creek Ranch on 6 June, (Steve Rottenborn, et al.) and Inyo County also produced a **Broad-winged Hawk** at Baker Meadow above Lone Pine (MH) on 6 July. This sighting is especially notable for this time of year. An unusually early **Baird's Sandpiper** (BB, et al.) was at the Whitewater River delta at the north end of the Salton Sea on 6 July but otherwise early shorebird arrivals, usually in significant numbers at that location by now, seemed to be on the low side. An exceptionally early alternate plumage **Dunlin** (Michael J. San Miguel) was at the north end of the Salton Sea on 26 July. At Santa Clara River estuary at McGrath State Beach a male **Ruff** in alternate plumage made a brief one day appearance on 1 July (Don Des-Jardin). Another one, also in nearly full alternate plumage, was found at the San Joaquin Marsh (RC) on

18 July and provided a temporary diversion to many birders waiting for the Bridled Tern to show up. An alternate plumage **Stilt Sandpiper**, originally found by (DDJ) and seen by other birders, was at McGrath from 1–4 July. **South Polar Skua** is rarely seen from the shore, but on 31 May, Kevin Larson saw one while scoping for sea birds from Point Vicente.

Four **Chimney Swifts** were seen around their usual summer spot in downtown Los Angeles on 11 July and up to five **Black Swifts** (MSM) were seen flying over the ridges above Wilderness Park in Arcadia on 1–7 June. These birds are undoubtedly foraging from their roosts behind Sturtevant Falls in Santa Anita Canyon in the San Gabriel Mountains. This is one of the most reliable places in southern California to see this big all dark swift.

On 4 July, Rich Stallcup found an **Eastern Wood-Pewee** at Mono Lake Park. The following day the Pewee was recorded giving the diagnostic call necessary to separate it from its western congener. The **Brown-crested Flycatcher** first reported by (GMc) in May was seen going into a nest hole and remained at "Rattlesnake Ranch" near Mecca well into July. An **Eastern Kingbird** (KL) was briefly seen at Point Vicente on 31 May. While working on the Atlas in June, Ron Beck found **Gray Vireos** in the chemise near Pyramid Lake that he suspected were breeding. Leo Ohtsuki found a **Red-eyed Vireo** at Huntington Beach Central Park on 13 June and likely the same bird was there until at least 20 June; one was in Palos Verdes Estates on 15 June (KL) and another was near Big Pine (Tom Heindel) on 26 June. A singing male **Northern Parula** was at Wilderness Park on 1 June (David Moody) and on 7 June, presumably, the same bird was seen with a female; on 6 June a singing male was at Harbor View Park in Newport Beach (KaG). At Birchim Creek near Big Pine in

Inyo County, Carina Gjerdrum found a singing male **Kentucky Warbler** on 4 June. A **Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler** and a male **Townsend's Warbler** found at Central Park, Huntington Beach on 10 June by (KaG) were the latest spring dates ever for those species in Orange County (Doug Willick). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** (Andrew & Leah Kirk) was seen near Independence from 12–14 June.

The month of August is all about shorebirds and places like Bolsa Chica and McGrath should be well covered by local birders. However, with runoff from late rains, the spring melt, and the ever burgeoning population in the Antelope Valley contributing increasing amounts of sewage into Piute Ponds, there was still a small stream running into Rosamond Lake well into July. For those of you who have permits from Edwards Air Force Base, Piute ponds and Rosamond Lake may be a good bet this year for decent numbers of shorebirds. A few non-breeding Marbled Godwits, Greater Yellowlegs and Willets were still there in early July. Piute Ponds may be the only place in Los Angeles County for shorebirds because the Los Angeles River is trashed from a massive construction project and water levels are too deep to allow for the algae buildup required to attract the invertebrates that peeps use for food. If shorebirds are not your thing and you just have to get your fix of migrating landbirds, mountain locations such as Chilao, Charleton Flat, Buckhorn, and any place where there is water, should provide plenty of bird activity because in mid-August the numbers of western fall migrants begin to peak. It's a great way to beat the heat too. 

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BOOK REVIEW

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY FIELD GUIDE TO California

Peter Alden/Fred Heath
Alfred A. Knopf. 447 pp. \$19.95.

Friends, welcome to a bright, *fascinating* view of the natural world of California. This brand-new book is not a field guide to the birds, to the insects, to the wild-flowers, to the mammals, to the geology of California, but to all of the above – and more. It is written in an easy, flowing style that skillfully clarifies the material. Drawings illustrate the inter-tidal zones on the coast, the anatomy of a mushroom, the tracks of mammals. And the photographs! Hundreds of them liberally spread throughout the book – of spiders, butterflies, ferns, oaks, lizards, fish and birds. The extraordinary variety of California's habitats is pictured with sweeping views of deserts, mountains, chaparral, oak woodland. Short essays comment on each habitat. On Coniferous Forests:

"Because deciduous trees cannot survive California's very dry summers, most trees in the state are evergreen, and most of the evergreens are conifers. Cone-bearing trees with needles or scale-like leaves that conserve moisture, conifers also tolerate cold and snowy conditions. California's varied climatic conditions and soil types support an amazing 56 conifer species (nearly half of which occur only in California.)" After this overview, the commentary continues with consideration of the Yellow Pine forests, the Coast Redwood Forests and the Douglas Fir – Mixed Evergreen forests. This treatment is typical of the field guide: interesting facts many of us have never thought about that become part of our understanding.

The species descriptions are



the usual informative data: size, field marks, habitat, range, and seasonal dates. There are four or five species on a page, each with a small photograph of the starfish or the dragonfly or the chipmunk. Browsing through the photo credits one finds a few familiar names. Herb Clarke, Larry Sansone and Brian Small are there with their superior bird pictures and a nice helping of flower and butterfly shots.

Most of us were lured into the outdoor life by the discovery of a particular world of birds or flowers, butterflies or mammals. We rarely paid much attention

to other life forms. Then we found that Monarch butterflies favored milkweed for their beautiful yellow caterpillars and we took an interest in milkweed plants. When someone cries, "Blue Grosbeak in the sycamore!" it helps to know

NEW AT THE BOOKSTORE

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS IN HOLLAND, BELGIUM AND NORTHERN FRANCE:

Best sites, best season, what species to look for, directions, weather, accommodations, practical advice.

Van De Berg, 1996. \$25.00

FIELD GUIDE TO THE MAMMALS OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND SOUTHEAST MEXICO:

48 color plates, range maps, major parks and preserves. Reid, 1998. \$29.95

GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE WEST INDIES:

Covers all 564 species known to occur, 86 color plates, range maps. Raffaele, 1998. \$45.00

A NEOTROPICAL COMPANION

(2nd edition, revised and expanded):

An introduction to the animals, plants and

ecosystems of the New World tropics.

Hard cover. Kricher, 1998. \$29.95

WILD INDIA:

Explore the intriguing diversity of Wild India. Teeming jungles, rich mangrove swamps, magical coral reefs, tropical rain forests, windswept deserts and the mystical "Roof of the World" — Himalayas. 90 minutes.

Video, Discovery Channel, 1993. \$19.00

RAIN FOREST, COSTA RICA:

Encounter wonders great and small in the tropical forests of Costa Rica. 60 minutes.

Video, National Geographic, 1993. \$15.00

THE AUKS: BIRD FAMILIES OF THE WORLD:

All species illustrated on 8 color plates, extensive text, range maps.

Gaston, 1998. \$75.00

THE BIRDWATCHER'S COMPANION:

An encyclopedic handbook of North America bird life.

Hardcover reprint. Leahy, 1982. \$12.95

sycamores. The field guides to birds and butterflies are not much use here; you need a guide to the trees and the plants. This unique *Field Guide to California*, in these examples, pretty much takes the place of at least three larger books to tote around. But it doesn't perform miracles. By its very nature it can't give you every species of living thing in California, only a representative number. There are at least 7000 species of beetles in the state; the Field Guide illustrates eight. These are the most common species, those you are most likely to meet. Though there are 70 pages showing 289 birds, there are well over 500 California species. The Western Peterson describes nine wrens; this Field Guide lists seven by omitting two accidentals, Sedge Wren and Carolina Wren. The Plain Titmouse, recently split into Oak Titmouse and Juniper Titmouse, is displayed with only one photo of the Oak species but mentions the Juniper as occurring east of the Sierras.

Very few of us know everything about the natural world. Birding may be your strong suit. In familiar haunts you may know most of the birds, but suppose you come across a dazzling flower or an intriguing butterfly. You want to know what this new find is but your references are on the shelf back home. If the *Field Guide to California* is with

you there's an excellent chance you'll see it there and experience the pure pleasure of discovery.

The comprehensive treatment in the Field Guide of every aspect of California is truly astonishing. Beyond description of the flora and fauna is the explanation of winds and weather, the rain shadow effect of mountains, the fossil record, the solar system, maps of the stars, the effects of glaciers, endangered and introduced species – all told in limpid prose. The last 50 pages describe national and state parks, nature preserves and wildlife areas for the entire state, telling what to expect in each and how to get to them.

A word about the make-up of the book. It is a pleasant book to handle. It's 4-inch width and 1-inch thickness plus its lightness (it weighs about one pound) makes it comfortable in the hand. Unlike a paperback, the cover appears to be plastic and almost indestructible. It will easily fit into the back pocket of a pair of jeans.

Congratulations to principal author, Peter Alden for a superb job and to Fred Heath of Los Angeles Audubon who wrote several sections and was a regional consultant. The prestigious publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, should be proud of their work. ■

Sandy Wohlgemuth
sandyw8@juno.com

Help Wanted

In the last issue of *Western Tanager*, we mentioned we had not yet lined up speakers for our September or October evening meetings. A glance at the back page tells you that we have rectified that situation with two excellent programs. However, we have still not found a volunteer for the job of Program Chair. If you are interested in this rewarding position please contact us as soon as possible. In the meantime, if any of our readers know of a possible speaker – perhaps one you've heard at another Audubon Society

meeting – or maybe you would like to give a talk, please let us know. We promise not to push too hard to get you to permanently become the Program Chair.

We are also looking for someone to keep up our website. Tom Frillman has graciously been handling this for LAAS, but as he already does a few things for us, such as putting together each issue of the *Tanager*, he would be happy to relinquish this to an interested volunteer.

WESTERN TANAGER

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PELAGIC TRIPS

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.

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.

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.

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FIELD TRIPS

Continued from page 12

Sunday, September 20 —

Ballona Wetlands. Bob Shanman will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland. Wintering shorebirds, sea ducks and gulls are 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 to Pacific Ave., then right to the lot on the right. Lot or street parking is usually not a problem. Three hour walk. Scopes helpful.

Saturday, September 26 —

Mojave Narrows. Harold Bond will lead us to this high desert wet spot in search of migrants. We might also see eagles, Merlin and other raptors, Vesper Sparrow and waterfowl. Meet alongside the entrance road before the parking lot entrance booth at 8:00 A.M. Take I-15 N towards Victorville, and take the Bear Valley cut-off E for about 3fi-miles. Look for a sign on the bridge. Turn left at the sign. The entrance road into the park will be on the left after the road curves. Park entrance fee \$5 per vehicle.

Sunday, September 27 —

Sparrow Workshop.

Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett. 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 technical topics without alienating intermediate birders. Krieger Hall, 2:00 – 8:30 P.M., Glendale Community College. Located west of the Glendale (2) Fwy, between the 134 and the 210 Fwy. No admission without a reservation! Send \$25 and a SASE to LAAS, Sparrow Workshop, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, CA. 90046

Sunday, October 4 —

Topanga State Park. Leader Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 6 for write-up.

Saturday, October 10 —

Oxnard Plain. Leader Fred Heath will be exploring the windbreaks 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. 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.

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. About two hours driving time from L.A. Call LAAS to register. Limited to 14.

Sunday, October 18 —

Ballona Wetlands. Leader Bob Shanman. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 20 write-up for details.

Sunday, 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 is expected. Bail out early if a full day doesn't suit you. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at the kiosk by the Malibu Lagoon lot. Take PCH northwest over the bridge, turn right and park on Cross Creek Road. Walk across PCH to the kiosk. Bring a lunch. Possible \$2 access fee at one spot.

Sunday, October 25 —

San Gabriel Mountains. Leader Karen Johnson. Enjoy the changing of the seasons and a crispness in the air during this autumn visit to the Angeles National Forest.

Mountain Quail, White-headed Woodpecker, sapsuckers, Mountain Chickadee, Brown Creeper, nuthatches, Purple and Cassin's finches and other montane species will be sought at Charlton Flat, Chilao and Buckhorn campgrounds. Meet to carpool at 8:00 A.M. on Hwy 2 in La Canada, just north of the 210 Fwy. Wear layered clothing; bring lunch. Drivers will need to display a National Forest Adventure Pass.

Sunday, October 11 —

Mojave Vicinity. Leaders Nick and Mary Freeman. We will car pool to Galileo Hill in search of late migrants and early winter birds, then return to California City Central Park for birds and lunch. We may bird Butterbrey Spring, time and conditions permitting. Come prepared for a possibly hot, dusty, fun day. Take Hwy 14 past Mojave about six miles to California City

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, September 8, 1998

Margaret Huffman, author of the recently published *Wild Heart of Los Angeles — The Santa Monica Mountains*, will make the pages of this beautiful and informative book come to life through this slide illustrated talk. Her book will be available for purchase and autograph.

Tuesday, October 13, 1998

A Dog's Life — Helene Heldring, who has done a lot of work with *National Geographic*, will illustrate her fascinating look at the wild dogs of Africa with many of the pictures she took while studying them over the years. Some of this study required following a dog pack all day, every day for several months.

F I E L D T R I P S

Before setting out on any field trip, please call the LAAS bird tape at (323) 874-1318 for special instructions or possible cancellations that may have occurred by the Thursday before the trip.

Sunday, September 6 — 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 often present. From Ventura Blvd., take Topanga Canyon Blvd. seven miles S, turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Follow the signs and turn left into the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$6 parking fee or park on the road outside the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

**Sunday, September 13 —
Salton Sea.** Leader: **Nick Freeman**. Anticipate 95–115°F, sewer stench and dust-a-plenty. Don't show up without lots of water (1 gal each), good health and a reliable car with AC. This is the gauntlet of SoCal birding. We should see Yellow-footed and Laughing gulls, Wood Stork, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Black Tern, Lesser Nighthawk, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, and possibly Least Bittern and Stilt Sandpiper. Perhaps most exciting is the possibility for real rarities such as Brown and Blue-footed boobies, Frigatebird and even stranger stuff that has popped up in September. Limit eight paid cars with two or more each. Singles will be wait-listed until they car pool. Send \$5 with

SASE per vehicle to Audubon House for reservation, general lodging and meeting details. Camping is risky; it may not drop to 90°F. Meet in Brawley at 6:00 A.M. and bird until 1:00 P.M. or so.

**Sunday, September 13 —
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, September 19 —
Huntington Central Park and
Bolsa Chica.** **Irwin Woldman** will lead us through Huntington Central Park in search of migrants and possible vagrants. Then on to Bolsa Chica to look at resident and migrating shorebirds. Meet at 8:00 A.M. at Huntington Central Park. Take 405 S and exit at Golden West. Take Golden West S three miles. Turn left on Slater and then right into the first parking lot.

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