

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

I FOUND AN UNUSUAL BIRD . . .

. . . NOW WHAT?

Kimball L. Garrett

Those who spend a great deal of time in the field (and even some who don't) inevitably bump into an unusual bird on occasion. The possibility of encountering the "unusual" is a driving force for some birders, sometimes even to the dangerous point where the unexpected is "expected". Unusual sightings are simply a pleasant diversion for others. But as anybody who has been grilled about an unusual sighting can attest, a bit of preparedness can go a long way. So let's imagine you're birding Malibu Lagoon and suddenly something unusual pops into view. What do you do? That depends, of course, on how one defines "unusual." A Willet with one leg is unusual. So is a House Finch with five toes or a Brewer's Blackbird eating a fish. But we'll confine ourselves to "unusual" in the sense of being outside an expected range or season. And that quickly brings us to the first issue: how do you know something is unusual?

Knowledge of status and distribution is a necessary foundation for developing good birding skills. Here in California—although we learn

new details every day—we have little excuse for not knowing the basics of seasonal and geographical bird distribution: books, journal articles, county and local checklists, and web sites abound. So before

you even set out for Malibu Lagoon, you undoubtedly double-checked the species accounts in *California Birds* by Arnold Small over your coffee and cereal. And the night

Semipalmated Sandpiper. OK, so you didn't really. But you get the point: knowing the patterns of bird status and distribution that have been established by many decades of field study will prepare you to recognize what is and is not "unusual." Then, of course, there are different degrees of unusual, from a "gee that's nice... I'll tell a friend when I get home" bird to something so unexpected as to have prompted the British to coin a colorful term that I can't repeat in a family Audubon newsletter (let's

just abbreviate it as "cosmic!"). In the rest of this article we'll explore the reporting and documentation of unusual birds of varying degrees.

The first thing to do when you encounter the unusual is to study (and enjoy) it. This is your first, and perhaps only, opportunity to gather the information needed to document an unusual sighting. Write down the bird's characteristics, including details of shape and structure, plumage, vocalizations, and behavior. You should always



Photos by Kimball L. Garrett
What if you saw this Broad-billed Hummingbird? This is a California Bird Records Committee review species, so immediate and thorough documentation is called for; carefully and completely documented sight records of this species are nearly always accepted by the CBRC. You'd also want to call this in to the 'hot line' as soon as convenient. This one was actually photographed in Santa Barbara County in October 1979.

before you, had curled up with the bar graphs in Garrett and Dunn's *Birds of Southern California* (reprinted and simplified in ABA's *Birder's Guide to Southern California*) to see if it was too early for a

have a notebook and a pen or pencil with you in the field. By describing (and preferably also sketching) a bird while it is under observation, you can refine your description by re-checking features and revising

the description as necessary. Only what you observe should cause you to revise your description (not what you read later in a field guide or other reference, and not what somebody else tells you you *should* have seen). The opportunities for writing notes while the bird is under observation will obviously vary with the bird and the conditions—a gull standing on a mudflat is easier than a warbler flitting high in a windy cottonwood! A description should include everything you were able to observe—don't limit your description just to the "field marks" or other highlights, although you shouldn't neglect to emphasize those characteristics that helped you arrive at your identification. Many birders carry a camera to document chance encounters with unusual species, so if you have one with you, this is the time to use it! For an excellent primer on the procedures for documenting unusual birds, see Donna Dittmann and Greg Lasley's article "How to document rare birds" (*Birding* 24:145-159, 1992).

When you've documented the sighting to your satisfaction, the next step is to let other people know. The more corroboration you can get on an unusual sighting the better. Depending on how unusual the sighting is, it may be advisable to call a local bird alert as soon as possible. The Los Angeles Audubon bird tape (323-874-1318) and (for immediate broadcast of more unusual sightings) the Southern California Bird Box (818-952-5502) are good places to start. Where and how you broadcast information about a sighting will also depend on the nature of the location (birds on private property or in fragile habitats often should not be publicized), the species (bear in mind special protections for certain sensitive species), and the sighting itself (there might not be an immediate need to get the word out about an Upland Sandpiper you watched get nailed by a peregrine!). We all go through a learning period as we struggle to determine the

reporting procedure that is proportionate to a bird's scarcity. Many will be annoyed if you put out a



Some birds, like this Red Phalarope, are hardly rare in southern California, but are irregular enough in their numbers and seasonal timing that your sighting will help solve a complex distributional puzzle. Such a sighting should be submitted with your seasonal *Field Notes* report, and documentation might be required for inland sightings. This photo was taken at Malibu Lagoon in November 1983.

full-scale alert for something as ordinary as a Rose-breasted Grosbeak or an American Redstart. But even more will be livid if you find something of Fork-tailed Flycatcher status and FAIL to put the word out. In addition to the bird alerts, you will probably have a circle of friends you'll wish to contact directly about certain sightings. And the Internet has opened up a whole new opportunity for reporting information to on-line birders.

Getting the word out is the first step of the reporting procedure. Ultimately, the more important step is to get your sightings into the permanent ornithological record. This starts with your personal field notes. As discussed above, note taking often best begins while the birds of interest are actually under observation. Immediately after the sighting but before references are consulted is the best time to pull together a thorough description based on the notes you took in the field. Eventually you will prepare a more complete documentation package which might include photos (if any), complete

write-ups, the results of your consultation of references, and any analysis you wish to provide.

Descriptions of rarities are only a small part of your field notes; your notes will ideally record all of the species observed (with numbers or some other indication of abundance), the extent and conditions of your coverage, and as much natural history information as is practicable to record. All birders should consult Van Remsen's paper "On taking field notes" (*American Birds* 31:946-953, 1977) for a lucid discussion of the

importance of taking notes and some "how-to" suggestions.

On a seasonal basis, you will want to compile your noteworthy sightings for submission to your local *Field Notes* regional editor or county coordinator. *Field Notes* is a journal of bird records for North America. Reporting regions across the continent summarize noteworthy observations, trends, and patterns for the Winter Season (December through February), Spring Migration (March through May), the Summer (Breeding) Season (June and July), and Fall Migration (August through November). This is the quintessential database for bird status and distribution in North America, and the regional reports depend entirely on observers like you. Seasonal reports should be submitted within two weeks of the end of each season. Reports for Los Angeles County should be sent to me at the Section of Vertebrates, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90007; addresses of other county coordinators are listed on Joe

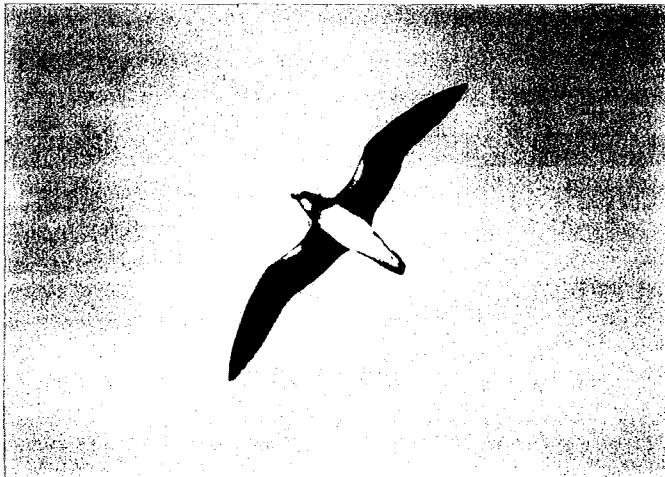
Morlan's California Birding web site (<http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmoran/county.htm>). *Field Notes* is now published by the American Birding Association (in alliance with the National Audubon Society), and it richly deserves your support, your input, and your subscription. Contact the ABA for subscription details. Review

recent southern California ("Southern Pacific Coast Region") reports to get a feel for what kinds of sightings are published in *Field Notes*, but bear in mind that county coordinators are usually interested in sightings of lesser, or more local, interest as well.

The California Bird Records Committee (CBRC), (Michael M. Rogers, Secretary, California Bird Records Committee, P.O. Box 340, Moffett Field, CA 94035-0340 e-mail: mrogers@nas.nasa.gov) reviews records of especially unusual birds. You may check the current review list on the Western Field Ornithologists/CBRC web site (www.wfo-cbrc.org). The CBRC makes a judgment as to whether the submitted documentation is sufficient to establish the identification as claimed. In most cases, records that failed to be accepted were deemed to lack sufficient documentation; it is infrequent that the CBRC feels that a misidentification was made. Reports of the CBRC are published annually in the journal *Western Birds*, and the CBRC is currently preparing a book summarizing the status of vagrant and scarce migrant bird species in California.

So now we've walked through the process of documenting and reporting an unusual bird, whether it's a slightly unseasonal Red Phalarope, an always-scarce

vagrant Broad-billed Hummingbird, or even a truly cosmic *Pterodroma* petrel never before found in North America. Documenting an unusual bird might seem like a daunting task, but it needn't be. You don't have to wait to find something unusual to practice writing descriptions. Make a habit of close-



If you were to encounter this Phoenix Petrel flying over the beach at Malibu Lagoon, you would spring into documentation mode immediately, then quickly switch to reporting mode! Of course this species is unrecorded in North America, so nothing short of the most thorough details (ideally with photographs and corroboration by other observers) would stand a chance of being accepted by the relevant records committees (this photo was taken on Christmas Island, Kiribati, in July 1987).

ly studying "common" birds – this will aid you in writing descriptions, and also give you a basis for picking out scarcer "look-alikes." Among the common birds you might try to really get to know are such species as Western, California, Herring, Glaucous-winged and Bonaparte's gulls, Western Sandpiper, Forster's Tern, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Lesser Scaup, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Pacific-slope, Hammond's, and Willow Flycatchers, Hermit Thrush, American Pipit, Orange-crowned Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Hooded Oriole, and Purple Finch. Only by knowing these birds thoroughly can you hope to find and identify related species which are scarce in this region. Spend time in the field writing thorough descriptions of these common birds; practice sketching their shapes, wingtip details, and plumage patterns. You can't know the unusual until you know the usual. 

Birds! Birds! Birds!

Fifth Annual Kern Valley Bioregions' Festival, April 23-25, during the height of spring migration, in Kernville and Weldon, Kern County, California. South Fork Kern River: Globally Important Bird Area (IBA). Butterbredt Springs: National IBA.

Pre-festival birding trips April 20-22, and April 26 post-trip. During the last three festivals, 185, 185 and 195 bird species were observed. Friday 'Cooperative Big Day' (in 1998-four groups observed over 100 species—132 tops).

Birding field trips covering: desert/oases, montane, riparian, pond/marsh, oak/chaparral foothill, grasslands, Lake Isabella—South Fork Wildlife Area by kayak. Small groups (8-15 people).

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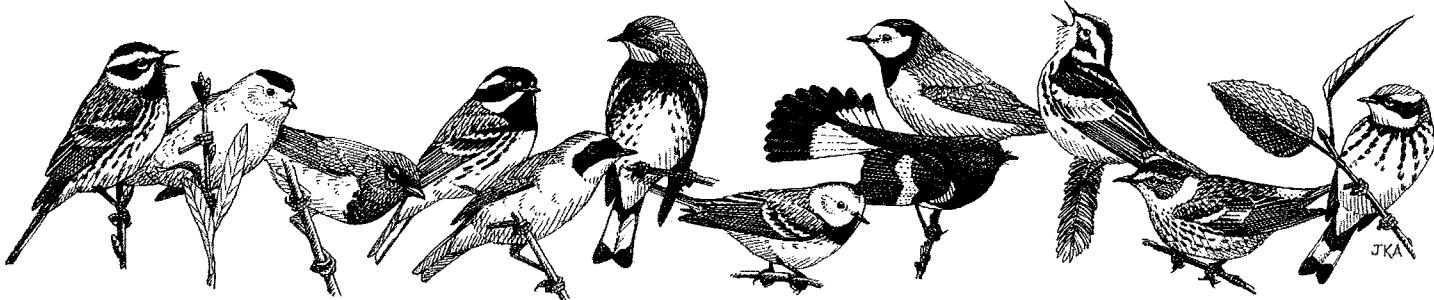
Sponsored by Audubon-California, Kern Audubon Society (Bakersfield), and Kerncrest Audubon Society (Indian Wells Valley).

To receive Festival Program contact: 800-350-7393.

For latest updates visit the Kern River Preserve web site: <http://frontpage.lightspeed.net/KRP>

For trip planning and specific birding inquiries contact: bbarnes@lightspeed.net or 760-378-3044.

Mail inquiries:
BioFest
PO Box 833
Weldon, CA 93283.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

Kimball L. Garrett

Another season of Christmas Count frenzy has come and gone, with a dizzying array of hits and misses. Obviously, Los Angeles County is not quite up to the standards recently set by our neighbors in Orange County and up the California coast from Ventura to Sonoma counties when it comes to amassing species totals on CBCs. Our county's relatively low species totals are largely due to a near lack of respectable coastal wetlands and a shameful lack of parks and other public open space. Also, the sheer number of Christmas Counts in the Los Angeles region makes it difficult to recruit thorough coverage on any given count—just too much competition for observers-power. Arguably, our troubles might also be due to the emigration from the area of one sharp birder after another as relentless population growth renders our county less and less livable. However, two counts on our coastal slope have demonstrated the potential to amass respectable CBC species totals in the 170s or higher—Palos Verdes Peninsula and Long Beach-El Dorado (about a third of the latter count is on the other side of the Orange Curtain). The Palos Verdes Peninsula count is supremely organized and scouted. The PV count circle suffers, however, from being a virtual island ecologically, lacking such “mainland” mainstays as Wrentit, Oak Titmouse, and Western Screech-Owl. The Long Beach count circle is heavily urbanized, but a few large and productive parks (such as El Dorado Park) and a

portion of the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge promote a good species total (which is increasing with ever-better coverage). The Malibu count is another well-organized affair, but this count will always expect an average of about 10 fewer species than Palos Verdes. This is due, ironically, to the fact that the Malibu circle is dominated by chaparral and other natural habitats, with less extensive planting of exotics that promotes winter diversity. The Los Angeles count is a traditional under-achiever—more thorough coverage of its parks and well-planted residential neighbor-

hoods could bring it back up to its “heyday” counts in the 170 range. Well-organized counts on the coastal slope but away from the ocean, notably San Gabriel Valley, get into the 160 range. But count totals drop off greatly in the true desert interior of the county (where Lancaster has to work to get 110 species!)

All of the above discussion touches on the fringe issue of species totals. High species totals are wonderful if they reflect good, thorough coverage. But Christmas Bird Counts perhaps are most useful in tracking large-scale year to year changes that are best exemplified by irruptive species such as crossbills, nuthatches and some finches. Preliminary results from this year's counts confirm that **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were widespread but suggest that a mini-invasion of **Pine Siskins** on the deserts in the fall didn't significantly impact the coast. Perhaps the biggest “invader” this winter was the **Mountain Chickadee**. This species routinely occurs along our foothills from early fall through winter, but only during an occasional winter are significant numbers found on more coastal counts such as Malibu, Palos Verdes Peninsula, and El Dorado; this was such a winter. I'm not aware of any **Evening Grosbeaks** reported on local counts, but Andy Starrett reports a flock of fifty over Newbury Park, Ventura Co., on 25 January.

Among the more interesting birds found locally (many on Christmas Counts) were two very

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:

Kimball L. Garrett
Ornithology Collections Manager
Natural History Museum of
Los Angeles County
900 Exposition Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90007 USA
e-mail: kgarrett@nhm.org

or call:

Raymond Schep (323) 874-1318
e-mail: drschep@colonial-dames.com

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

Michael M. Rogers, Secretary
California Bird Records Committee
P.O. Box 340
Moffett Field, CA 94035-0340
e-mail: mrogers@nas.nasa.gov

unusual winter warblers, a **Black-burnian Warbler** in Palos Verdes Estates on 26 December (John Ivanov) and a **Magnolia Warbler** at Wingate Park in Covina 15+ January (Michael J. San Miguel). Although we have come to expect a diversity of wintering wood-warblers in the "urban woodlands" of our area, these two species remain among the rarest of wintering warblers in California. The Patagonia Picnic Table Effect produced a **Dusky Flycatcher** at Wingate Park on 17 January when Tom Wurster found one in the same trees that the Magnolia Warbler occupied; there are only a handful of mid-winter records of this *Empidonax* in Los Angeles County. **Gray Flycatcher** is the most expected Empidonax in winter in our area; records this winter included one in the Athens neighborhood of south Los Angeles on 14 January (Larry Schmahl). A **Pine Warbler** (seemingly almost annual in winter in the region in recent years) had already been discovered in El Dorado Park, Long Beach, prior to the Christmas Count; not only did it cooperate, but a **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** materialized less than a quarter of a mile away on count day (Jim Pike, Tom Wurster, 27 December). Other unusual warblers on the Long Beach count included a **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Scherer Park (Doug Willick) and a returning **Chestnut-sided Warbler** in Pan American Park (Karen Gilbert).

Larry Sansone was surprised by a **Brown Thrasher** in his Hollywood Hills driveway on 25 January; records of this species in California seem to be on the decrease. A **booby** flying past Malibu Lagoon on 26 December (Steve Hampton) was possibly a Masked Booby, but it has not been refound. An interesting bird farther afield was a **Trumpeter Swan** near Bishop in Inyo Co.; the status of this bird is greatly muddled by translocations and "reintroductions" (including some into areas which did not historically host breeding Trumpeters!), so it is refreshing that the

Inyo bird bore a collar that showed that it was a truly "wild" bird from Idaho!

Increases and decreases in our normally-occurring species are always of interest to those who spend a good deal of time in the field. One species definitely on the increase in our area is the **Western Gull**. Although overall breeding populations of this species might even be on the decline according to some researchers, the segment of the population that pushes inland from our coast is definitely on the increase. This species is now routinely observed in small numbers in the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys, where it was considered accidental a couple of decades ago. It is common in the urban core of Los Angeles, including Exposition and Echo parks. At Castaic Lagoon, north of Santa Clarita, a few Western Gulls could often be seen in the '80s and early '90s, but the last couple of years have seen a huge buildup of numbers, to the point where 600 birds were counted there on 9 January (Kimball Garrett). Large numbers are also routinely seen over the Simi Valley, perhaps commuting to landfills. The reason for the explosion in Castaic may be the closing of one of the main landfills inland from Oxnard, according to Don DesJardin. Perhaps these birds are just penetrating farther inland to get their fix of garbage. Does the ability to exploit garbage sources bode well for the Western Gull? An interesting paper just published in the journal *Ecology* by Cynthia Annett and Raymond Pierotti (*Ecology* 80:288-297, 1999) suggests that long-term reproductive output is much lower in garbage-feeding Western Gulls than in fish-eating individuals of the same species; junk food translates to fewer offspring and a shorter life span, but it's cheaper than sashimi. So it will be interesting to see what happens in the long haul with the new culture of Western Gulls that has learned to come inland for easy pickin's at the dump!

The decrease of an introduced

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bird species can hardly be looked upon as an ecological catastrophe, but it is still of interest that **Spotted Doves** seem to be withdrawing from much of their former range in Los Angeles County, especially in the western San Fernando Valley. Their numbers have reached a long-term low in the San Gabriel Valley as well. Most populations have disappeared from Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Of greater concern, no doubt, is the continuing decline of **Grasshopper Sparrows** in our area. Brian Daniels found one in lower Bouquet Canyon, Santa Clarita, on 29 December; this species has always been spotty in winter (and being such a skulker, extremely difficult to detect when not singing). Virtually all of the extant Grasshopper Sparrow breeding habitat in the county is targeted for large-scale urban development—our county planners score a fat “F” for protecting open grassland and grassland/sage scrub mosaic habitat! Better sparrow news comes from Ballona Creek, where Richard Barth, Jim Abernathy and Barbara Elliott found a **Large-billed Savannah Sparrow** on 9 December (and still present as of the end of January); there is only one other well-documented record of this distinctive sparrow in Los Angeles County in the past three decades. Finally on the sparrow front, entomologist Julian Donahue took enough of a break from staring through a microscope at moth genitalia to discover a **White-throated Sparrow** in his Mt. Washington yard on 13 January.

Spring migration is in full swing as I write this in the last week of January. One of our earliest spring migrants is the **Sage Thrasher**; their early movement is illustrated by a count of 12 in the Antelope Valley on 23 January (Jean Brandt and LAAS Field trip). A couple of Sage Thrashers were also noted in December in the Antelope Valley, but it is clear that many “spring” birds were passing through by late January.

The remainder of spring migra-

tion has been canceled this year, the last year of fieldwork for the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas. Vagrant junkies will have to forego tallying up a few more spring Northern Parulas, Red-eyed Vireos and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in order to buckle down for the final push in what has been an incredible project. In March and April our resident species will be

starting to nest in full swing, especially in the coastal lowlands and deserts. If you haven’t already done so, contact Atlas Coordinator Mark Wimer (213) 745-2473 and help put in the final few pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of Los Angeles County breeding bird distribution. Even if you don’t sign up to cover a block, be sure to send in any and all nesting observations to Atlas Central. 

ANNOUNCING THE LOS ANGELES AUDUBON BIRDATHON!

SATURDAY APRIL 17, 1999

(0000 TO 2400 HOURS)

- Form a team with your favorite birding companions.
- Choose a name for your team.
- Get sponsors—family members, work-mates, your company—to pledge a certain amount for each species seen by your team during this 24-hour period.

PRIIZES

- **Those teams and sponsors attending the kickoff, Friday, April 16, 1999, 2100hrs (9 P.M.) at the El Coyote Cafe, 7312 Beverly Blvd., Hollywood (3 blocks west of La Brea) will get a prize of a *Mexican pizza for one and a Mexican coffee*. At 2300 hrs (11 P.M.) you will be shooed off so you can start at midnight!! (Or prepare to start early the next day.)**
- **Most original team name: \$25.00 bookstore gift certificate** to be awarded at the monthly evening meeting May 11, 1999.

• THE BIG PRIZE

Highest team dollar total amount plus species count. Passage on the next *LA Audubon Pelagic trip*, a \$45 value (maximum three awards in the winning team).

Official team not considered for prizes.

IF YOU CANNOT PARTICIPATE, THEN PLEASE SPONSOR!

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Starr Ranch Sanctuary will host our second annual day of natural history workshops exclusively for southern California Audubon Chapter members on Saturday, May 8, 1999, from 8 A.M.–3 P.M. We are gathering some of the best biologists in southern California who will offer workshops on such subjects as bird banding, hawks and owls of southern California, mammal tracking, native plant identification, mountain lions, insect identification, biology of bats, coastal sage scrub and much more. This will be a unique opportunity for our southern California Audubon Chapter members to broaden their natural history knowledge in a beautiful outdoor setting. Starr Ranch is a 4000-acre National Audubon Society preserve in southeast Orange County.

Workshops are intended for adults and older children with natural history interests. Attendance is by reservation only. \$10 donation per person to cover costs. Space is limited. To make your reservations call Sandy DeSimone at (949) 858-0309

Starr Ranch Sanctuary, 100 Bell Canyon Road, Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679

YOUR LAST CHANCE

Fred Heath
Project Director

For those readers who haven't been paying attention, the Los Angeles Audubon Society has been sponsoring the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas for a number of years. As a matter of fact we have completed four of the five years of field work for this massive undertaking. And, this is the fifth and final year of the project, which means, of course, that this is your final year to gain immortality as contributor to this important and fun endeavor.

There are a number of ways for you to get involved. The most straightforward is to volunteer to do your own block. Coverage of a block usually requires a commitment of only about 20 hours over the course of four or five visits in the late spring to early summer. The map shows the coverage we've achieved in the 410 blocks in Los Angeles County over the prior four years. You will see a number of blocks which have not yet been started, especially in the northern half of the county. Please feel free to call Mark Wimer at Atlas Central (213) 745-BIRD [745-2473] and let him get you started with a suggested block, topo map, Atlas Handbook, target list and field card.

If you are not sure that you want to start your own block, come out to our Breeding Bird Kick-Off in the Antelope Valley on March 27 (see Field Trips, page 11). We will

be fanning out in the valley to do a few of the blocks which have not yet been started. Because the terrain is flat and the habitats less varied, these blocks can usually be completed more quickly than those in the nearby foothills and mountains. If after working one or more of these blocks during the Kick-Off, you find that you would like to finish them yourself, this can certainly be arranged.

Another area which might appeal to you is owling. Although we have a few owl species which are widespread breeders, because of their nocturnal habits, our species

ly want to actively look for breeding activity, but do get into the field and occasionally stumble on breeding activity such as a bird on the nest or maybe one feeding young, we ask that you send in the observation to:

Los Angeles County
Breeding Bird Atlas
Natural History Museum
of Los Angeles County
900 Exposition Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90007

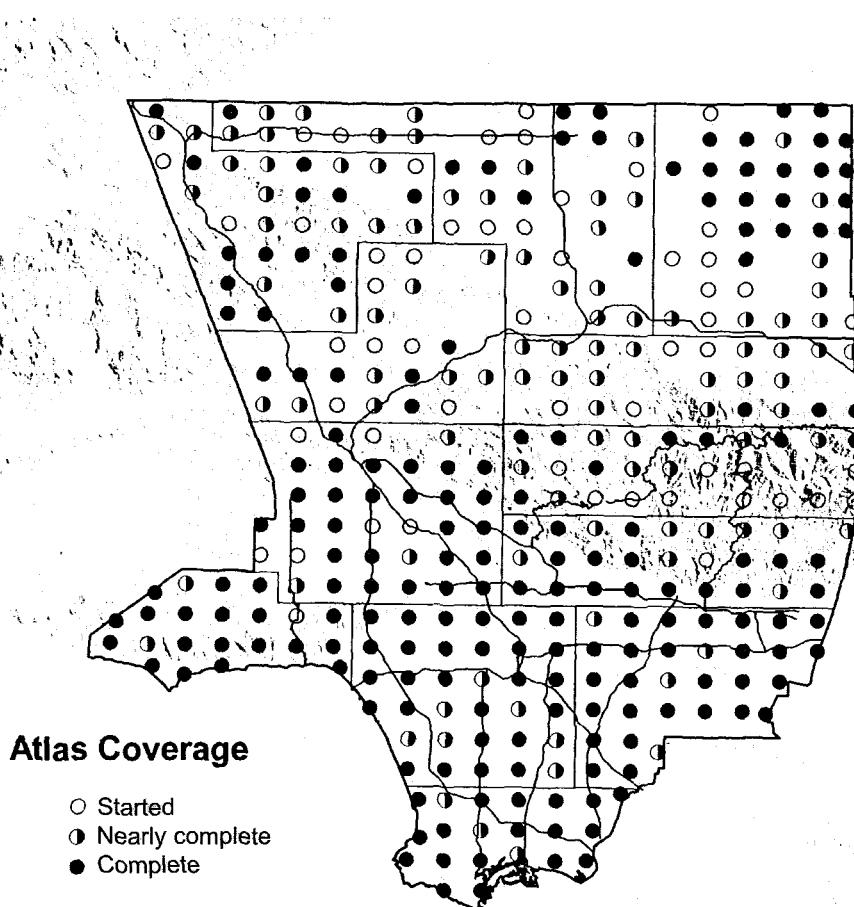
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On-line data submission to:
www.lam.mus.ca.us/~lacbba/cof.htm
This allows you to directly access

one of our Casual Observation Forms (COF) or you can have Mark send you a few COFs via the U.S. Postal Service for the more traditional method of submission.

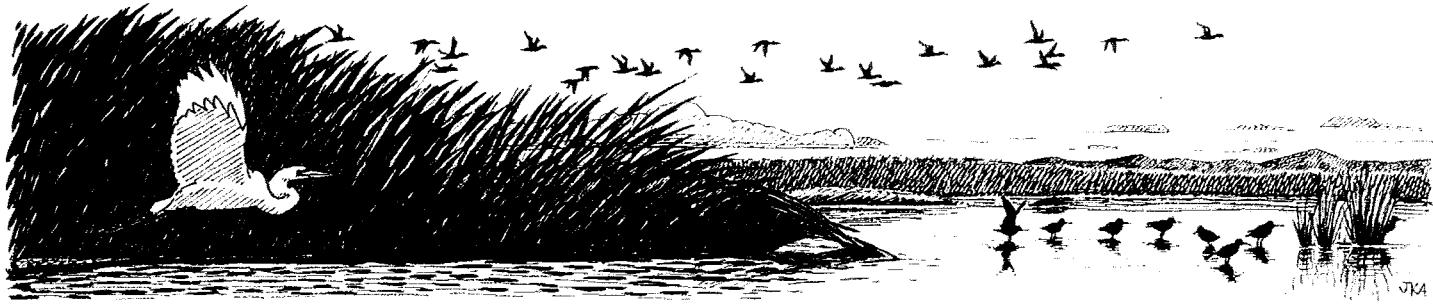
Many of you have started a block or at least volunteered to complete one. If so, please try to complete the block this year. As they say, "There ain't no tomorrow." If you know that you won't be able to complete your block, please let us know as soon as possible, so the block can be reassigned. Finally,

a few of you good folks have done the field work or noted breeding evidence but have not provided that information to Atlas Central. Let's get that information in pronto, so we can focus on the areas and species that have not yet been documented and not waste time where the work has already been done.



maps for breeding owls are quite incomplete. Mark Wimer has been putting together owling routes for volunteers to go out at night and listen for owls to fill in those voids. Give him a call. He'll be glad to send you down some dark road in the middle of nowhere!

For those of you who don't real-



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Lynne Plambeck is a leading activist opposing the 70,000-person development that will despoil the untamed Santa Clara River and destroy a vast piece of California countryside. Here are excerpts from a recent letter of hers:

"...the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the huge 21,000-unit monster sprawl, Newhall Ranch, on Tuesday, November 24th.

...what I really resent is the very well-planned strategy to subvert public involvement. We were told for weeks that there would probably be no hearing, then maybe we'll have it, maybe we won't, then four days prior to the hearing was the first time the staff report was available to review and comment on the substantial changes—and of course right before a major holiday weekend! At the hearing, we were given *a minute each* to comment on the largest project ever proposed in the state of California. Zev Yaroslavsky talked on the telephone, Gloria Molina was not there" and the others seemed to pay little attention. "Then they closed the hearing and unanimously approved the project..."

Big Tujunga Wash is a unique habitat under siege by a golf course. The previous attempt to build a course was denied by the Army Corps of Engineers because of a real threat to an endangered species and intrusion of debris into the Wash in the event of a severe storm. Yet the Los Angeles Planning Commission unanimously approved the present project with substantially the same drawbacks.

Mayor Riordan appoints the commission.

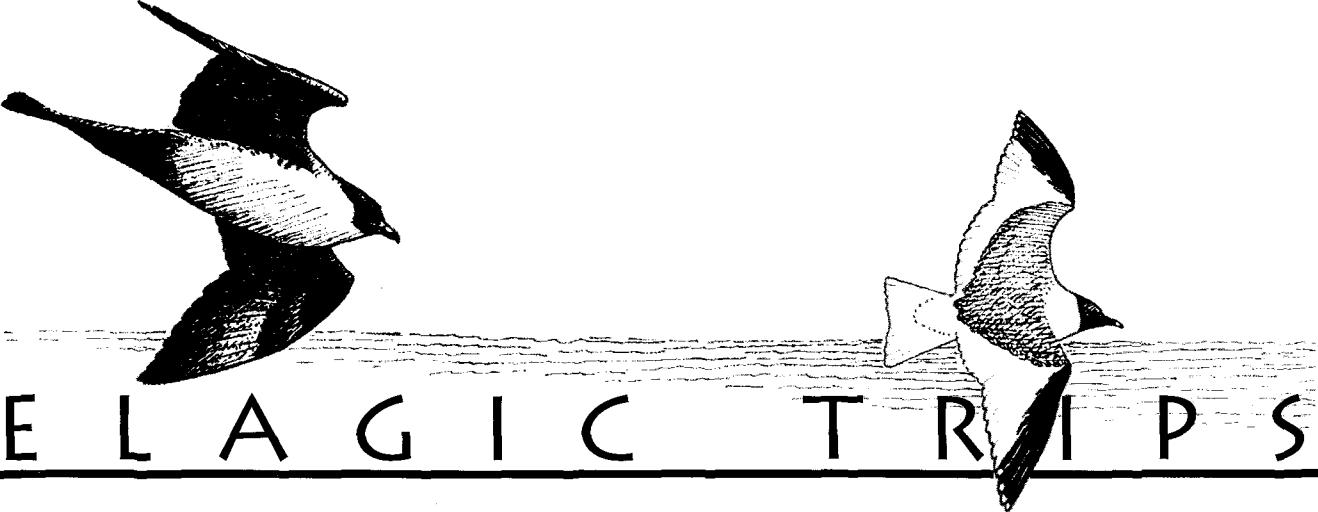
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Chatsworth Reservoir, empty for many years, is the largest remaining open space in the San Fernando Valley. It belongs to the Los Angeles Department Water and Power and its 1300-acres contain ancient oaks, Native American artifacts, splendid vistas, deer, bobcats and a wealth of birds. A plan by the DWP to sell off its excess property has stimulated the historical interest of realtors in acquiring this choice bonanza. The president of the Water and Power Commission has indicated he is open to some "minor" uses of the land such as housing, commercial business, golf courses and soccer fields. Rick Caruso, the president, is a developer himself. Recently he was slated for confirmation for another term

by the City Council and drew a large audience of protesting environmentalists to the hearing. Councilman Hal Bernson, though a land-use conservative, has a passionate affair with this reservoir in his district. A few years ago he got the council to declare it a wildlife preserve. He has been a highly vocal critic of Caruso and forced him to agree to confer with environmental representatives and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy within 90 days. Caruso did nothing to promote this conference in the allotted time and he has been called before the council to explain his inaction. (The commission is appointed by the mayor and must be approved by the council.)

• • • • •

Is it reasonable to wonder why the Mayor of Los Angeles appointed a real estate developer as head of the Water and Power Commission? Or why his appointees to the Planning Commission voted *unanimously* to approve the golf course in the Wash? The golf course was later defeated in the City Council, which is *elected* by the people. Mayor Riordan is a multimillionaire who has shown little enthusiasm for environmental protection. When he runs for re-election should we vote for him? 



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.

Saturday, May 8 —
Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Banks. 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: TBA. \$45. Bring your own food. Coffee and tea supplied.

Saturday, June 12 —
Santa Cruz Island with landing at Prisoners Cove. 10-hour trip departs from Ventura. This beautiful island is the largest and most varied of the Channel Islands. We will take a short walk with a Na-

ture 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: TBA. \$60, full galley.

Saturday, August 21 —
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: TBA. \$130 includes 3 meals.

Sunday, September 19 —
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: TBA. \$70, full galley.

Sunday, October 10 —
Santa Barbara Island and the Osborne Banks. 12-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey. We will

head out to the open ocean toward Santa Barbara Island as we search for pelagic birds and marine life. \$45, microwave only.

Saturday, November 13 —
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: TBA. \$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.

FIELD TRIPS

... continued from page 12

Sunday, March 14 —

Whittier Narrows. Leader:

Ray Jillson. Meet at 8:00 A.M. to view colorful resident and migrating birds, including Northern Cardinal. Take Peck Dr. off the 60 Fwy in South El Monte (just west 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.

Sunday, March 21 —

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, March 27 —

Breeding Bird Atlas Season

Kickoff. Come join Atlas birders and coordinators in starting the fifth and final year of the now famous LA County Breeding Bird Atlas. Come and get information on how to atlas and then look for early desert nesting birds in field trips that day. Bring lunch and re-group for wrap-up at noon. Site will be in the Antelope Valley. Call Mark Wimer for specific location (213) 745-2473. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, March 28 —

El Dorado Park. Come celebrate the beginning of spring with leader

Raymond Schep as he searches for winter residents and some early migrants. Recently seen birds have been Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Pine Warbler and Vermillion Flycatcher. Take 405 S to Studebaker Rd. Go N and turn right on Willow. Go one-half mile to the entrance booth on the right. Meet inside the gate at 8 A.M. \$5.00 fee per car.

Saturday and Sunday, April 3-4 —

Spring on the Carrizo Plain. Join naturalist **Roy Van de Hoek** for a weekend of nesting prairie birds, spectacular wildflowers, Chumash Indian Rock Art and views of the San Andreas fault. Breeding birds are Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, Western Meadowlark, Horned Lark, Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike and Long-eared Owls. We will also look for the endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox and the Giant Kangaroo Rat. \$15.00 per person, \$5.00 surcharge for one person vehicles. 10 car limit. 10 rooms are reserved in California Valley. Sign up with Audubon House for exact directions and information.

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), you will be so notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation after that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement. Millie Newton is available at Audubon House on Wednesdays from noon to 4:00 P.M. to answer questions about field trips. Our office staff is also available Tuesday through Saturday for most reservation services.

Saturday and Sunday,

April 10-11 —

Owens Valley Grouse Trip.

Mary Freeman will lead this road intensive weekend. Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, Blue and Sage grouse, and raptors are expected. Limited

to 20 participants. Send \$10 and SASE to LAAS for reservation and where to meet in Big Pine early Saturday.

Sunday, April 11 —

Topanga State Park. Leader

Gerry Haigh. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See March 7 for write-up.

Sunday, April 11 —

Whittier Narrows. Leader

Ray Jillson. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See March 14 for write-up.

Saturday, April 17 —

Los Angeles Audubon Birdathon. See Birdathon write up on pg. 6.

Sunday, April 18 —

Ballona Wetlands. Leader

Bob Shanman. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See March 21 write-up for details.

Saturday, May 1 —

Morongo Valley.

Join **Irwin Woldman** to look for migrant and resident species in this desert oasis. Meet at 7:30 A.M. in the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve parking lot for the morning field trip. Those interested can meet early at 6:30 a.m. for some birding in Covington Park across the street. Take the 10 Fwy. past Beaumont, turn N on State Rt. 62 to Morongo Valley, and turn Rt. on East Drive across from Rocky's Pizza. Take the first driveway left into the lot. About 2 hours drive from L.A. Anticipate heat, hunger and thirst.

Friday through Monday,

June 25 to 28 — Southern Sierra Weekend with Bob Barnes.

Likely: Goshawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pileated Woodpecker and owls. Approximately 150 species seen in a typical year. Participation limited. For information flyer, reserve with SASE. Fee: \$11 for each day attended (\$44 for four days). Reserve rooms early.

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, March 9, 1999 Roy Van de Hoek

The Carrizo Plain is fascinating for the spectacular wildflowers, Chumash Indian Rock Art and the wildlife that includes the endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox, Giant Kangaroo Rat, Tule Elk, Pronghorn Antelope, Sandhill Crane and nesting prairie birds. This illustrated talk will explore the natural history and future of this interesting area.

Tuesday, April 13, 1999 Dr. Raymond Schep

Come with us for **Birding Adventures in South Africa** with this slide-illustrated program of Dr. Schep's former home.

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 in-
structions or possible cancellations
that may have occurred by the
Thursday before the trip.

Sunday, March 7 —
Topanga State Park.
Gerry Haigh will lead partici-
pants through this diverse coastal
mountain area. An ideal trip for a
beginning birder or someone new in
the area. A biologist is often pre-
sent. From Ventura Blvd., take
Topanga Canyon Blvd. 7 miles S,
turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Fol-
low the signs and turn left into the

parking lot of Trippet Ranch. Park-
ing fee \$6 or park on the road out-
side the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday and Sunday,
March 13-14 —
Anza Borrego with **Fred Heath**.
The spring explosion of desert flora
and fauna should be well underway
in the Colorado Desert, including
butterflies and early birds in the
throes of breeding activity. Sugges-
ted accommodations: Tamarisk
Grove Campground (reserve
through Destinet at (800) 444-7275)
or Stanlund Motel in Borrego
Springs (760) 767-5501. Anticipate
a busy weekend, and reserve camp-
ing by January 15 or motels earlier.
Limited to 20 participants. Send
SASE with \$5 fee to LAAS to learn
7:00 A.M. meeting place and more
details. Pleasant days, cold nights.

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

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Continued on page 11 . . .