

WESTERN TANAGER



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The Rio Tiputini is narrow compared to the Napo River, Ecuador's giant white water tributary to the Amazon. Along the Tiputini, the vegetation encroaches and bird songs overwhelm. Blue-throated Piping Guans bob their heads in the treetops. Scarlet Macaws screech overhead. Rival troops of Dusky Titi monkeys chorus hysterically from opposite sides of the river, while an Undulated Tinamou whistles unseen from the forest's edge.

Last spring, my partner, Monica, and I led a class of Tropical Ecology students from Boston University into the Amazon Basin. The undergrads were young, keen and interested in science and culture. Some had never left New England before. Tiputini was to be their introduction to neotropical lowland rainforest. Home of the Huarani Indians and bordering Yasuni National Park, we journeyed down river to explore this biological Eden.

More than a research facility, the Tiputini Biodiversity Station (TBS) is a jungle lodge designed for educational groups including birding tours. Equipped with student quarters, guest rooms, open air dining room, air-conditioned lab and video room, the parameters of "roughing it" are redefined. Guest rooms, with plumbing and

fans, are spacious and tightly screened. The staff conduct excursions, cook your meals, wash your laundry and even make your bed. The Woolly Monkeys swing by late in the morning and the Tiny Hawk hunts by the water tower. Watch for caimans in the river, but don't worry, they're only dangerous when they wiggle their ears!

Teaching tropical ecology, with a rainforest as your classroom, is an enviable assignment. However most rainforest neophytes are initially overwhelmed by the luxuriance of green and can't easily distinguish the trees from the forest. Students struggle to impose order on an ecosystem

nate between lecturing on neotropical ornithology and observing birds in the field. The trick is finding everyone a front row seat at the practice demonstrations.

During our first guided walk, we encountered a swarm of army ants, not thirty feet from the student ghetto. An auspicious learning opportunity! From huge temporary nests constructed of up to 700,000 of their own living bodies, army ants spill out onto the forest floor to conduct foraging raids. Moving in a fan-shaped mass, they dismember every living animal they can subdue and carry its body parts back along a return trail as food for the colony. The leaf litter boils with prey attempting to escape the

advancing swarm. Ant-following birds, lizards and other animals gather to feed at this concentrated food source. I spotted a

Black-banded Woodcreeper swooping down from a tree to snatch a fleeing scorpion.

Monica pointed out a White-plumed Antbird, with spiky face feathers, perched low above the swarm on a sapling. Stinging ants were crawling over

everyone's rubber boots. Some students remained to savor the carnage, but others fled from possible harm. None of them saw the Reddish-winged Bare-eye

Journal from Tiputini

by Darrell Hutchinson

that is infinitely complex and wholly interdependent. As instructor, you alter-

skulking behind the swarm front.

Afterwards, we tried honing our field skills in small groups. Using the station's class set of Swifts, we practiced basic binocular techniques. Once upon the trail, I detected an understory flock of mixed species: lots of gray, black and brown little flitty antwrens well off the path and beyond this group's skill level. Further on, a canopy flock of frugivores



Photos by author

Wire-tailed Manakin (*Pipra filicauda*)

passed overhead. "Let's see", I said, "a White-shouldered Tanager, possible female Flame-crested Tanager, very titchy tyrannid, hmmm?" After 30 seconds, I was the only one even looking up. Oh well, they were high up and the light was bad. Fortunately, the trail was seeded with tagua nuts, *Viola* nutmegs, several strangler figs and an impressive monkey ladder liana.

Further up the trail, a small lone bird, dreadfully back lit, was perched upright in the open. Not looking quite right, I maneuvered to get a better angle. A quick look confirmed my interest. I checked Hilty's Bible (a.k.a. *Birds of Colombia*) and indeed it was – a Lanceolated Monklet. Both rare and furtive, it was a long awaited lifer for me. My enthusiasm was contagious but not infective. Thwarted by poor light and mediocre binoculars, the students admired its cuteness and expressed pleasure at seeing something Darrell didn't recognize. Vanity indulged, at least.

The monklet notwithstanding, my ace was yet to play. Up the hill and around the bend was a lek of Wire-tailed Manakins. With a brilliant yellow and black body, red crown and extended rectrices, the male Wire-tailed is a neotropical gem. One particular male occupied a very open position in the understory within its dispersed lek. Active through-

out the day, the Wire-tailed's repertoire includes swooping flights between display perches, a series of side shuffles, a bending forward and erection of the back feathers and wings in a fanlike display and a penultimate caress of the female's throat with its long tail filaments prior to copulation. Any one of these dance steps was sure to impress.

We sneaked around a bend and where was it: uh-oh, gone to lunch. Up the trail, we approached a rival male's location. I heard a whirr, a snap, and saw a blur of color. Spooked him. Okay, back to the first. "Patience is the key during a stakeout," I announced. At last, Alpha arrived. He swooped in, did the shuffle and zipped to another perch. He performed the fanned wing maneuver to ooohs and aaahs of appreciation. Closely related to flycatchers, manakins developed frugivory and, in so doing, released themselves from having to defend a feeding territory. Although patchily distributed, fruit is an abundant and constantly available resource in the rainforest. Driven by female selection, males gradually evolved more elaborate displays and gaudier plumage. Fruits even provide the carotenoids for the deposition of reds, yellows and oranges in the male manakin's feathers.

After a few weeks, some students wanted to observe mixed species flocks. Understory flocks are best located by wandering the trails and following promising leads (or leaders). Flock members are vocal, so encountering them isn't particularly difficult. Keeping up with the passing parade, however, requires skill and experience. The birds pass quickly and forage actively. It's difficult to follow any one bird for more than a few seconds, and since most *Thamnophilids* (typical antbirds) are sexually dimorphic, there are many plumages to learn. Fortunately, flock composition remains fairly stable, so after some practice and a little homework, the players do reveal themselves.

In Amazona, each understory flock contains one or two nuclear species of *Thamnomanes* antshrikes. Nuclear species sound the morning revelry and assemble pairs and family members of neighboring foliage-gleaners and antwrens to serve as core species. Different styles of foraging reduce competi-

tion. Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners probe the dead leaf clusters. Dusky-throated Antshrikes sally. The morphologically similar Long-winged and Gray Antwrens glean at different heights. Meanwhile, the Cinereous Antshrike acts as sentinel against predators and, in return, benefits by eating arthropods flushed by the beating of the gleaners. Traveling together through the forest, the flock defends a large feeding territory and maintains foraging efficiency.

Nuclear and core species are regularly joined by opportunists and floaters. Opportunists, like the Violaceous Trogon and Great Jacamar, forage with mixed species flocks when the flock travels through their territory. Floaters are flockers who lack fidelity and move between different understory and canopy flocks. Canopy flocks are best studied from a tower, unless you enjoy neck pain.

Throughout the Amazon, huge emergent trees rise above the forest canopy. Giant Ceibas (or Kapok trees) with great buttress roots and umbrella crowns, tower imperiously above their neighbors. At TBS, the staircase up to the tower ascends four times around "The Ceiba". Three platforms are constructed within its spreading limbs. The highest measures 118 feet. Many raptors, parrots, barbets, toucans and cotingas inhabit the forest canopy along with several species of hummingbirds. Members of these families regularly land in The Ceiba, the Epiphyte tree, the Umbrella tree, the Penis tree or the Three Towers. (You have to be precise when you're describing the location of a Yellow-browed Tody Flycatcher – a bird whose name spelled out in capital letters is greater than its body length.)

Neotropical birding is challenging in many ways, partially because there are so many species. Over half the birds in the forest sometimes travel in mixed species flocks, some exclusively. So imagine yours truly late on a warm afternoon sitting on a lawn chair looking out over the Amazon rainforest. "Larry", the resident Lawrence's Thrush and avian world's most prolific mimic, is singing the songs of twenty other birds. He rests unseen in the foliage. A couple of Yellow-headed Vultures drift past. I set the binos down, put my feet up, feel my eyelids getting heavy.... Suddenly I hear a

different chirp, followed by a descending whistle and a loud call. Something little flies up into The Ceiba. Then, something else. They're here, and another glorious flurry of feather and sound has begun. For the next hour, I'm dashing up and down and around the three tower platforms. At least 70 individual birds and 30 species will pass. Some of the students have just learned the difference between a kingbird and a woodpecker. Others can spot the Striped Woodhaunter. Madly, I try to model good birding and point out the most interesting species amid the foray. Some students strive to keep up. Others descend the tower to try botany. The action is frenzied, as colorful dacnis and honeycreepers flit by. I spot a steely gray flycatcher, fairly large and perched right in front of us. "Let's see, it's got long wings and a prominent eyering. Oh my! Look over there. It's a turquoise cotinga with a purple throat. It's beautiful. Where's the field guide? I've got to look it up right away." By now, I'm blathering. "OMIGOD! Look at this tanager right in front of us on the small down turned branch in our tree. It has a lime green head, black wings, red butt, blue breast"... and so it goes.

The western Amazon Basin has the highest species diversity in the world. How so many species can share a single habitat is an important ecological question. In the case of the family *Thamnophilidae*, many very similar looking species occupy different microhabitats. Foraging on similar prey, they divide the resource by carving out separate ecological niches. Gray Antbirds inhabit vine tangles in the subcanopy. Undulated Antshrikes occupy the vine tangles around treefalls. Black-throated Antbirds like forest streams. Streaked Antwrens prefer the river bank. Plain-throated Antwrens are found close to the forest floor. Short-billed Antwrens are up in the canopy. The Spot-winged Antshrike travels with canopy flocks, while the Cinereous Antshrike leads understory flocks. Finding all these species requires stealth, knowledge, good fortune and a tape recorder.

On occasion, I would invite students to "enter the world of the hardcore," but most of my *Thamnophilid* hunts were conducted with Tiputini's gifted native

guide, Meyer. Meyer always led and I followed. Upon localizing an unknown vocalization, we quietly discussed its possible identity and then, more often than not, crept off trail in pursuit. If I was quick on the draw with my shotgun mike, we might hang back and try to lure the skulker out from under cover with a playback. The average response time is brief, so concentration is paramount. Zeiss or Leica help too. You have to enjoy the thrill of the chase, because although species like Undulated and White-shouldered antshrikes are highly coveted, good views are fleeting.

Drifting along the Rio Tiputini is a wonderful alternative to walking forest trails. "Floats" are richly sublime and provide an opportunity to see animals that frequent the riverbank or live underwater (notably jaguar, capybara and river dolphins). Everyone keeps an eye out for wildlife, but as the native crew guides the large canoe around meandering bends, your senses become lulled by the droning insects, passing forest and flowing of the river.



Poison-dart frog, fairly common at Tiputini.

Identifying and calling out birds from the bow is a guide's bane and joy. "Another Blue-throated Piping Guan at two o'clock," rings pretty hollow by the third week. "There's a tiny Yellow-bellied Dacnis back lit on top of the tall tree behind the second Cecropia," commands respect but rarely excites much fervor. Discovering a perched Crane Hawk or a fruiting tree full of cotingas confers redemption, but only those still paying attention can appreciate it.

The birding is great with flycatchers galore. Twenty different species partition the riparian habitat and share its food resources. Gray-capped Flycatchers with tiny bills snatch small insects from dead

twigs. Larger Boat-billed Flycatchers occupy higher perches and sally for bigger prey. Drab Water Tyrants (the quintessential little brown jobbie) flit back and forth along the river's edge. While midway on an exposed branch, a pair of Cinnamon Attilas sits and waits for a moth or butterfly.

Parrots routinely visit a nearby clay lick, where the minerals in the soil help neutralize the toxins ingested from eating seeds. Every morning, hundreds of parrots arrive to eat the mud. Tracking and identifying individual birds is difficult, though perseverance is rewarded. Mealy, Black-headed, Orange-cheeked, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned and Orange-winged parrots, as well as Dusky-headed Parakeets, frequent the lick. Landing in the treetops, the psittacids squawk, preen and maneuver themselves into position to descend onto the clay bank. Every once in a while, a deafening clamor will erupt as three hundred parrots explode out of the trees to escape the talons of a swooping Ornate Hawk Eagle.

Night floats, as you can imagine, offer a whole new perspective. By holding a decent flashlight at eye level, you can direct a beam to reflect the eyeshine of nocturnal creatures. It's kind of creepy, for all around is black except the two glowing red dots staring back at you. The Rio Tiputini hosts giant fish-eating bats, spaghetti snakes and plenty of caiman. Nothing too scary, although large Black Caiman (4m plus) are always dramatic. After weeks into our stay and many a night heron and nightjar, one of the Huarani Indians dared Monica to pick up a caiman off the river bank. I guess partly to spice up the evening and partly to hone those caiman catching skills, Monica accepted the challenge. The boatman maneuvered us over to the bank and Monica stepped out. The students, although conditioned to expect the unexpected from their Prof, were totally unprepared. Poised above the four foot long caiman, Monica quickly grabbed it around its neck and base of the tail. It writhed and snarled, testing the limits of Monica's strength. Fulfilling my role in the show, I reached out to touch the caiman's back. It suddenly thrashed and nearly bit my hand off. Reactions ran from disbelief through mortification to

Tiputini

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GOING WALKABOUT

by Carol "Kiwi" Donovan

Kai ora. By the time you read this I will have migrated to the Southern Hemisphere, following the sun. My five years at the LA Audubon Bookstore have been wonderful, thanks to all of you and the volunteers that came in to help out regularly. Special thanks to Anne, Karen and Martha. We have been a great team and that has made running the bookstore a pleasure. Imagine having a job that allows you to talk about travel and birds all day and the opportunity to study and learn about world birding – how lucky for me. I could have stayed forever, but it's time to go "walkabout" again. The spirit of adventure is beckoning me to set forth the way it has so many times before. Journeying to a new place, tasting new and exotic foods and not knowing exactly what tomorrow will bring, but most of all, to visit wild places to see wildlife and indigenous cultures before they vanish forever.

I toured the world from 1988 to 1994 and found each country had much to offer and each culture fascinating. Because I've always been an explorer at heart, life-on-the-road, staying a month or two here and there, is the lifestyle I love most. It's the special places, protected areas set aside for wildlife, that I spend most of my time, enjoying the ambiance and helping out where I can at the grassroots level, teaching English to park rangers and local people so that they can earn a bit of money as guides, encouraging them to learn the english names of the birds and animals. When a hunter/poacher realizes that people will pay to LOOK at a bird, simple math will show him that the bird is more valuable alive, therefore they must also save the habitat.

One of my birding goals is to see a member of every family in the world and according to Jim Clements there are currently 204. I will be carrying the 5th Edition of the Clements' *Birds of the World, A Checklist* which includes all subspecies. I find this book a superb way to record my sightings and study distribution, and it is the most widely recognised reference book used by world birders that I meet in the field. Best of all, when

other travelers see me using it they become curious about what I am doing and then I get a chance to promote wildlife conservation. Many an evening in a youth hostel or at my accommodation at a national park I have an opportunity to tell my travel and birding stories. The next day I take some of those interested on a birdwalk; they are always amazed at what they see once I've shown them how to look.

As far as where am I going and when, well, I have no set plan really, just following the sun. Some of the circle-the-world tickets offered by www.airtreks.com are very tempting and they are good for one year. I could make a quick stop in LA, pick up field guides from the bookstore, visit my daughter, have a mammogram, visit my parents and still have 10 months to explore. I'm making no commitments!!!

Year 2000 in the South Pacific.

December 14th, Los Angeles to Sydney, Australia: to spend a few weeks with my very interesting extended family, take a pelagic trip out of Rose Bay and search for the one-and-only Plains-wanderer (!) near Deniliquin.

January 14th, Melbourne to Auckland, New Zealand: to do some birding, campervaning and tramping with my aunt through many of New Zealand's special places. We are booked to do the famous Milford Track on March 2nd. How lucky for me that my parents are still alive. They live in Christchurch, along with my two sisters and their families, and I'm looking forward to spending quality time with them all. I am a registered member of the Ngai Tahu Maori tribe from the South Island and I'm looking forward to going to a hangi at the Kaikoura Marae. My mouth is already watering for some traditional Maori food, whitebait and paua patties and bluff oysters the size of a saucer. Dad has probably already saved me a mutton-bird, forgive me but I'll have to eat it – blame it on my Maori genes.

May 6th, Auckland to Noumea, New Caledonia. New Caledonia is an Overseas Territory of France and sounds wonderful. This is also the home of another

endemic family, the one-and-only KAGU. This bird has made a remarkable recovery from the brink of extinction thanks to the dedicated work of one man, Yves Letocart. More proof that one person CAN make a difference. More than ninety species have been recorded in New Caledonia, twenty-two are endemic and there has been a recent sighting of the presumed extinct New Caledonia Owllet-Nightjar.

May, Noumea to Vanuatu, if time permits. By boat, to see pelagics and the nine endemics there. On the island of Espiritu Santo there is a great trail to Mt. Santos through undisturbed forest up to 5591 feet, where one may be lucky enough to see the endemic Mountain Starling. It's a three-day hike using local guides and is another opportunity to support the local economy. It should be possible to see all of the endemics in this area.

June 10th, Noumea to Auckland and beyond. I'll be island hopping through Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Rarotonga for six months. Sleeping on the decks of copra boats, taking local ferries and dugout canoes. I've always loved the island lifestyle and the slower pace, so there will be plenty of time to go birding, snorkeling and enjoy village life and food.

Can't tell you where to from here: New Guinea, Indonesia, SE Asia, Southern Africa, India, you name it, I'll be there sooner or later. There's lots to do if we are to make this a better and safer place for our feathered friends.

Aloha and good birding.

Maori words used:

kia ora - hello, good luck and good health

hangi - meals cooked in an earth oven,
served along with maori music

whitebait - translucent, elongated small fish, a delicacy.

paua - abalone

Everyone at LAAS, indeed everyone whose life has been touched by this remarkable woman, wish her all the very best on her journey. —ed.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

You win some, you lose some. When the DWP Commission declared that the 1300-acre Chatsworth Reservoir/Nature Preserve would never be developed for sports, housing or commercial activities but remain a natural area for public enjoyment and environmental education, we thought we had won one. We still do.

But, on November third, the ominous headline indicated that we might end up losers: "Golf Course Cleared to Tee off. Arbitration Panel Rejects State Plea. Gives OK to Private Red Tail Development." We're speaking about another long and hard struggle in the San Fernando Valley to rescue a rare habitat from unwise development — Big Tujunga Wash. For many years, environmentalists have been fighting off the owners of property adjacent to the wash in their determination to build a golf course. Their latest attempt was voted down by the Los Angeles City Council which, frightened by a \$215 million lawsuit, caved in and approved the Red Tail golf course.

California Fish and Game Department

(DFG), a vigorous opponent of the golf course, after being notified by the owner that it intended to divert or obstruct the natural flow of water and change the stream bed and the bank of the wash, asked the owner to sign an agreement. DFG made it clear that the wash was its *jurisdictional area* and would not issue permits to the owner to introduce vehicles or equipment, construct any buildings, allow pesticides, fertilizers or herbicides to flow from the golf course into its jurisdictional area. It announced its right to enter the project site to ensure compliance and to cancel the agreement if any of its terms are breached. Why is DFG so adamant in its desire to prevent harm to the wash? It says, "The Department has determined that such construction may substantially adversely affect those existing fish and wildlife resources within Big Tujunga Wash...." And, "The project area has three state-designated sensitive plant communities, riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub, coastal sage scrub and southern sycamore-alder riparian woodland."

Several months passed since this Agreement was sent to the owner who

certainly could not have signed a document that would make it almost impossible for the golf course to be built. An arbitration panel was formed headed by a retired Superior Court judge and included a representative of the golf course and one from DFG. The judge ruled in favor of the owner. The DFG man did not sign the ruling and did not comment upon it. Work will begin this winter and the course will be finished in 2001.

At this writing (Nov 3), the future looks bleak for Big Tujunga Wash. The environmental community is holding its breath, wondering what can be done. Can Fish and Game sue? The decision of the panel could be a precedent for similar actions by private parties against environmental agencies. But this was not an action decided in a court of law. Can jurisdictional issues be arbitrated? It seems unreasonable that a state department's authority can be swept away by the opinion of a retired jurist, however honorable. We can only wait and hope for a miracle. 🐾

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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

by Kimball L. Garrett

Elysian Park

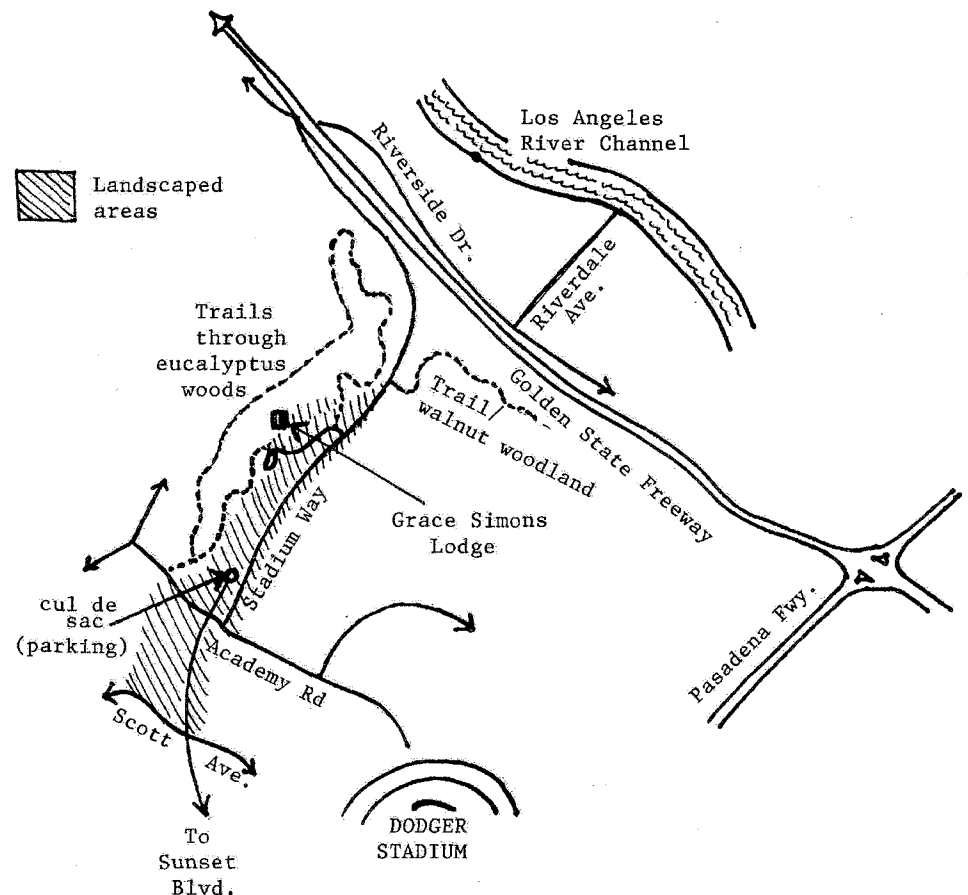
Urban parks can provide excellent birding in migration and winter – their blend of various exotic trees and shrubs often provides a smorgasbord of food for passage migrants and overwintering species. But urban parks are even more interesting when they present a combination of exotic and natural habitats and Elysian Park, one of the largest and oldest parks in Los Angeles, is one such place. Located just north of downtown Los Angeles, Elysian Park is roughly bounded on the south by Dodger Stadium, the east by the Pasadena Freeway, the north by the Golden State Freeway and the west by the residential areas of the Echo Park district. The park combines landscaped areas and eucalyptus covered hillsides with remnants of native walnut (*Juglans californica*) north slope woodlands.

Elysian Park is probably best known as the home of Chavez Ravine, a site that ultimately became Dodger Stadium and its corona of parking lots. The decline in Neotropical migrants, wetland birds, grassland habitats and other hallmarks of biodiversity has been paralleled by a decline in the once-proud Dodger organization, and I must admit my somewhat regular coverage of the avifauna of Dodger Stadium has tailed off a bit in the last couple of years. Those who do choose to attend games might watch for the occasional kingbird (Cassin's and, from April to August, Western) around the light standards and foul (fowl?) poles. Cliff Swallows and White-throated Swifts often forage around the stadium lights at dusk (and sometimes swallows are even flying about well after it is nat-

urally dark). After one game, Jon Dunn and I encountered a Lesser Nighthawk in the parking lot! Of course the stadium hosts Cardinals regularly and remember the Baltimore Orioles in 1966? (Did Willie Davis *really* make three errors in one inning?).

The best birding in Elysian Park is in the area west of Stadium Way from the Grace Simons Lodge area on the north to Scott Avenue on the south. Park in the small lot just north of Academy Road (where Stadium Way makes a slight jog). There are picnic tables and

restrooms here. One can walk north from this parking lot, which ends in a small cul de sac, through the landscaped park planted with eucalyptus, live oaks, jacarandas, *Ficus* and a variety of other trees. A tiny concrete-lined drainage channel runs south through this area, and there are often small puddles of water around the cul de sac where a variety of migrant and resident birds come to bathe. The slope to the west of the landscaped areas has some native shrubs such as elderberry, toyon and California walnut, along with a variety of exotics



and a woodland of eucalyptus. A few very large fruiting *Ficus* trees at the base of this slope attract huge numbers of House Finches, but also a variety of other species. A dirt fire road parallels the west side of the landscaped park and eventually climbs up into the eucalyptus woodlands; another fire road through eucalyptus is found just north of the Grace Simons Lodge.


Migrants and overwintering warblers, tanagers and orioles can be numerous in both the landscaped areas and the eucalyptus woodlands; the eucalypts are most productive when flowering (mainly winter) or, recently, when infested by Red Gum Lerp Psyllid insects, whose larvae secrete sugary "lerps" on the leaves which are attractive to a variety of gleaning birds. Flocks of 10-20 Western Tanagers and Bullock's Orioles have been noted here in winter, and wintering Black-headed Grosbeak and Baltimore Oriole have also been seen. Certainly it would pay to scour this area in winter for even more unusual orioles and tanagers.

Scarcer migrants and vagrants found here recently in fall and winter include Virginia's, Lucy's, Magnolia and Blackburnian warblers, Northern Parula and Clay-colored Sparrow. The last species has been found with juncos or White-crowned and Chipping sparrows at the foot of the slope both in the cul de sac area and between Academy Road and Scott Avenue. Regional "specialties" that are fairly easy to find here include Nuttall's Woodpecker, Allen's Hummingbird, Oak Titmouse, Phainopepla and California Towhee. Western Bluebirds have nested recently, and here are numerous nesting raptors (including Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Cooper's hawks, Great Horned Owls and occasionally Western Screech-Owls). Lawrence's Goldfinches are frequent, and irruptive wintering species (such as Mountain Chickadees and Pine Siskins) are sometimes present.

Near the north end of the park, just before Stadium Way drops down the hill to Riverside Drive and the Golden State Freeway, a fire road leads east through native walnut woodlands. Although a few chaparral species nest here, better developed walnut woodland can be found to the northeast at Debs Regional Park. Spectacular numbers of Vaux's

Swifts are found at peak migration times (late April and early May, and again in September and early October) over the slopes at the northeast corner of the park, above the Pasadena/Golden State Freeway interchange. Favorable air currents and perhaps a steady source of aerial insects originating from the Los Angeles River channel combine to attract up to several thousand feeding swifts and a variety of swallows. Check for Black Swifts here in late May and Chimney Swifts from late May through early September. For those going on to bird the Los Angeles River in the Glendale Narrows area, continue down to Riverside Drive and access the river at the north end of Newell Street or from the mini-parks at the north ends of Knox Avenue (a block west of Newell Street) or Riverdale Avenue.

Another nicely landscaped portion of Elysian Park is in the upper Solano Canyon area. From Stadium Way, take the road opposite the Grace Simons Lodge Road up the hill to the east. You will pass Angel's Vista (with spectacular views on clear days) and a set of Little League fields, then descend into an area of lawns, sycamores and eucalyptus which is well worth checking in winter and migration.

A word of caution about birding the park. Stadium Way is a not-so-secret shortcut for commuters coming in and out of downtown, and traffic through the park during rush hour can be snarled. Plan to bird the park early on weekend mornings (before picnickers and soccer players reach peak abundance) or on late fall and winter mornings after about 9:00 A.M. An alternative is to arrive very early (certainly before 7:00 A.M.) and bird until traffic lets up, tolerating the traffic noise. Similarly, avoid the park in the late afternoons when there are Dodger night games, and after mid-morning for day games. Otherwise the park is a safe and enjoyable area, extensively used by walkers, joggers and, increasingly, birders from surrounding neighborhoods. 


*A very special thank you to
John Schmitt for his original art, the
banner for our new feature article,
Off the Beaten Track.*

Tiputini

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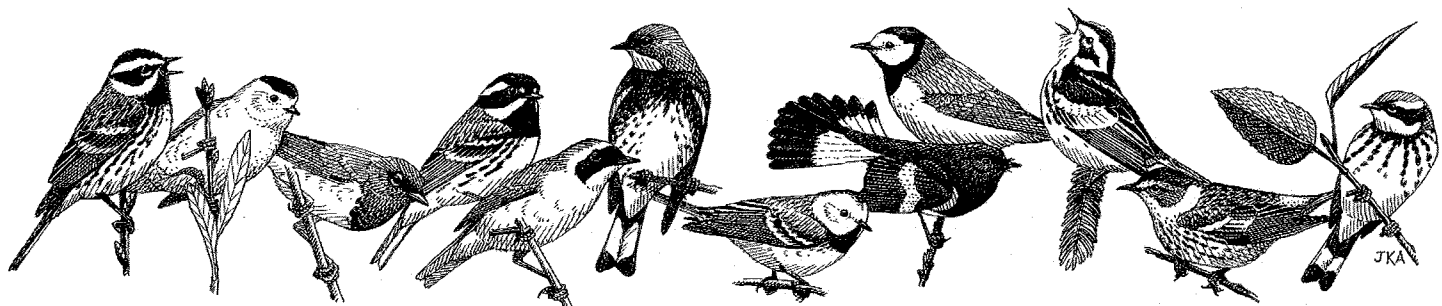
exhilaration. Shutters clicked and flashes flared, while Monica and the croc both flashed big toothy grins. Everyone was duly impressed and Monica's deed was accepted into the annals of Tiputini lore.

Probably the single most nurturing thing about the Amazon rainforest is knowing that at any given moment you have the chance of seeing something absolutely amazing. Late one morning, while performing the stealth routine (listen, walk quietly and carry big binos), I heard a chorus of frantic bird calls coming from across a shallow stream. I stopped immediately and began to search for the source of alarm. A yellow, dark-spotted cat was prowling along a fallen tree limb. It stole down the branch and up onto the trail right in front of me. As it emerged from the vegetation, the small sleek feline suddenly noticed I was there. It froze still, as did I. At only 12 feet away, I was able to appreciate its rich coat, subtle markings, strength and elegance. After about fifteen long wonderful seconds, it sprinted down the trail and around a corner. I dashed after and watched it bounce over a shrub and disappear into the forest. It was an Ocelot and it was fabulous.

After ten weeks at TBS, Monica and I found the contrast between virgin rainforest and the congested streets of Quito to be quite alarming. We remained in Ecuador for two more months, helping students analyze data, write projects and perhaps consider a career in tropical biology. Everyone was touched by Tiputini and carried home memories of a unique wildlife sighting or mystic rainforest experience. 

Darrell Hutchinson and Monica Swartz live in Austin, TX, with their African Gray Parrot, Moby. They hope to return to Tiputini to continue their research on army ants and ant-following birds.

For information on visiting Tiputini Biodiversity Station, contact Carol Walton at tiputini@aol.com



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Kimball L. Garrett

A promising migration with a large, steady movement of "normal" western migrants in the early fall slowed considerably at the end of September and through October as a long spell of hot, dry weather settled in. But we must remember to distinguish between conditions that are good for the birds and those that benefit the birder. Undoubtedly most of our migrants were able to pass through our area unopposed by bad weather, dense coastal fog, or unseasonal cold snaps. This might not have led to great conditions for large fallouts or for long-distance vagrancy, but recall that fallouts occur because conditions are difficult for the migrating birds. Hoping for a massive fallout or a long-lost vagrant is simply wishing that migration will go awry.

Eucalyptus trees throughout the region continued to be severely impacted by the Red Gum Lerp Psyllid mentioned in the last *Tanager*, with the fall onslaught of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** finding the lerps particularly to their liking. Affected eucalyptus groves had a constant cacophony of Audubon's "chip" notes – just like the din we associate with flowering eucalyptus a bit later in the winter. Relatively few unusual warblers were noted in Los Angeles County this fall, though the tamarisks of the Oxnard Plain and well-covered parks of Orange County fared better. In the latter area both a **Yellow-throated Warbler** (of the "expected" subspecies *albilora*) and a **Worm-eating Warbler** were seen by dozens of observers at Huntington Beach Central Park in November. The eucalyptus trees at Elysian Park in Los Angeles harbored a **Northern Parula** on 5 October and an adult male **Blackburnian Warbler** on 13 October (Kimball L. Garrett). Dick Barth found a **Magnolia**

Warbler in a well-wooded residential area in central Los Angeles on 22 October. A **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and a **Palm Warbler** were at Bonelli Regional Park on 20-21 November (Jon Fisher). Palm Warblers were also found at Debs Regional Park and DeForest Park (Long Beach) in October (Dan Cooper).

The most unusual bird of the fall in the Los Angeles area was a subadult **Masked Booby** found on the Los Angeles breakwater by Charlie Collins and Stu Warter on their 13 November class pelagic trip. The bird was refound that afternoon by the LAAS pelagic trip closer to Cabrillo Beach, but was not seen thereafter; its bill color confirmed that it was a Masked Booby, and not the orangish-billed "Nazca Booby" which is

increasingly considered a separate species. A **Xantus's Murrelet** was in the harbor at Cabrillo Beach on 14 November (Kevin Larson). Single individual **Laughing** (Dharm Pellegrini; 3 November) and **Franklin's** (Larry Schmahl; 17 November) **gulls** were found in Santa Monica.

Raptor migration is a very real phenomenon over the Los Angeles region, though it doesn't reach the famed, frenzied scale one encounters elsewhere in the continent. There were several reports of flocks of **Swainson's Hawks** over the Los Angeles area in October. Eighty **Buteo** over El Monte on 21 October (Bernardo Alps) were mostly Swainson's Hawks, and six Swainson's were over Debs Regional Park northeast of downtown Los Angeles on 30 October (Dan Cooper). Dan also had a **Short-eared Owl** migrating over Debs Park on 3 November. **Merlins** continue their increase, and were routinely found in the area after late September. **White-tailed Kites** are clearly on the up side of their well-known population cycles, and were found in many areas locally including the Ballona "Wetlands", Sepulveda Basin, San Gabriel River and even Taylor Yard adjacent to the Los Angeles River in the Glendale Narrows.

Weedy riverbottoms and dam basins in the area concentrate huge numbers of granivorous birds in the fall. This year the jackpot was at the mouth of Walnut Creek where it enters the San Gabriel River in Baldwin Park. In addition to 200+ **Orange Bishops** (many of which had been banded by Scott Smithson behind the Whittier Narrows dam last fall) and 100+ **Nutmeg Mannikins**, there were hundreds of **Savannah**, **Lincoln's** and **Song sparrows**. Mike San Miguel found several **Bobolinks** there in early October, and their numbers peaked

Records of rare and unusual birds reported in this column should be considered tentative pending review by the regional editors of *NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS* or, if appropriate, by the **California Birds Records Committee**.

For *Birds of the Season*, send 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

To report birds for the tape, 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


at 14 on the amazingly late date of 25 October. Alas, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works became intolerant of all this habitat fouling up their "plumbing" and bulldozed the place clean in early November, with hundreds of migratory sparrows left to seek another place to forage. This agency has plans for increasing their rate and degree of channel clearance, just another step in the "war on vegetation."

Rufous-crowned Sparrows are generally immune from the effects of the destruction of weedy riverbottom habitat, but nevertheless have suffered local declines as coastal sage scrub is replaced by housing tracts. So it was with some surprise that individuals were found this fall in two areas where populations were thought not to exist: the Baldwin Hills (Dick Barth, Kimball Garrett) and Debs Regional Park (Dan Cooper). A returning wintering "**Large-billed**" **Savannah**

Sparrow was discovered along the Balona Creek Jetty on 9 October (Dick Barth). A **Swamp Sparrow** was at Sepulveda Basin on 5 October (Dan Cooper). Both **Lapland and Chestnut-collared longspurs** were on a set of sod farms in Palmdale on 30 October (Mike SanMiguel and Bruce Broadbooks).

A roost survey of parrots in the San Gabriel Valley on 21 September yielded at least 1175 *Amazona* (nearly all **Red-crowned Parrots**) and about 200 *Aratinga* (mostly **Mitred Parakeets**). The area, roughly centered around the intersection of Baldwin Avenue and Live Oak Avenue in Temple City, continues to attract phenomenal numbers of parrots to evening roost sites.

As the year 2000 rolls up on our calendars we're probably psychologically predisposed to wipe the slate clean on various matters and begin afresh. Perhaps this is an attitude we can apply to

our birding in the coming days, months and years. For example we can resolve to keep better records of our sightings and record better documentation for unusual species. We can likewise resolve to submit our significant observations for publication in the indispensable journal *North American Birds*, via the various county and regional editors, and submit documentation for review list species to the California Bird Records Committee. We can introduce a greater element of exploration in our birding travels, rather than visiting the same old well-worked localities or having our birding itineraries dictated by the latest news on the "hotlines." And most importantly we can resolve to make our voices heard more emphatically when it comes to supporting the preservation of bird populations and the habitats on which they depend. 

LAAS Tours 2000

Conducted by Olga Clarke

September, 2000 – South Africa and extension to Namibia, with Geoff Lockwood, South African birding guide.

SOUTH AFRICA – (main tour) September 4-18, 2000

Including Cape Town and environs, Durban, KwaZulu Natal's Dolphin Coast, Hluhluwe Game Reserve, Ndumo Game Reserve in Maputaland and Mala Mala, the largest privately owned tract of "Big Five" country in Southern Africa.

NAMIBIA – (post extension) September 16-25, 2000

From Johannesburg, visiting Windhoek, Namibia, Damaraland, Ongava Game Reserve and Etosha National Park. Then Sossusvlei Wilderness Camp, located within the Namib-Naukluft Park.

November, 2000 – Egypt, with Ahmed Mohamed Riad, noted Egyptian wildlife field researcher and professional birding guide, and **Kenya**, with Francis Kitayi, avid local birder/naturalist.

EGYPT/KENYA – (main tour) November 18-December 4, 2000

This trip combines birding with viewing the amazing antiquities. We will cruise down the Nile on a deluxe cruise ship, stopping to visit the various temples and ancient cities, and conclude with a visit to Kenya, exploring the heart of East Africa, its birds, big game and culture.

THE RED SEA and THE SINAI – (post extension) December 4-7, 2000

From Nairobi, we will return to Egypt to bird Sharm El Sheikh, visiting the famous Ras Mohammed National Park where the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba meet, along with birding spectacular mountainous terrain.

For more information, contact: Olga Clarke, Travel Director
2027 El Arbolita Drive
Glendale, CA 91208
Ph/fax: (818) 249-9511
e-mail: laas@ix.netcom.com

www.LAAudubon.org





PELAGIC TRIPS

Saturday, February 19 –

Palos Verdes Escarpment to the

Redondo Canyon. 8-hour trip departs at 7:30 A.M. from San Pedro on the R/V Vantuna. Birds seen in prior years: Northern Fulmar; Short-tailed, Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; cormorants (3); Brown Pelican; Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets in alternate plumage.

Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Michael J. San Miguel.

\$30 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, May 20 –

San Pedro Channel and out to sea.

12-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 6:00 A.M. on the R/V UCLA Sea World. Birds seen in prior years: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Sabine's Gull; terns (up to six); Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (4-5); Common Murre; Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: puffins have been seen twice in 14 years. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Barney Schlinger. \$45

Saturday, June 10 –

Island Scrub-Jay Trip! Santa Cruz Island, landing at Prisoners' Cove.

10-hour trip departs from the Ventura Marina at 8:00 A.M. on the M/V Jeffrey Arvid. This beautiful island is the largest and most varied of the Channel Islands. We will take a short walk with a naturalist from the Nature Conservancy to see the flora and fauna as we search for the endemic Island Scrub-Jay. We will then cruise off the island for pelagic species. Birds seen in prior years: Northern Fulmar; Pink-footed, Sooty and Flesh-footed (rare) shearwaters; Black Storm-Petrel; Sabine's Gull; Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus's Murrelet; Island Scrub-Jay; island races of the

Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Horned Lark, Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow and House Finch. Rarities: Buller's Shearwater and Saw-whet Owl.

Leaders: Mike San Miguel and Mitch Heindel.

\$60 – bring food and drink.

Saturday, August 26 –

Red-billed Tropicbird Trip!

18-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 5:00 A.M. on the R/V Yellowfin.

Early morning departure past Santa Catalina Island to the deeper waters south of San Nicholas Island.

Birds seen in prior years: Red-billed Tropicbird (seen on every trip); Leach's Storm-Petrel; Long-tailed Jaeger; South Polar Skua. (Blue Whales have been seen on this trip).

Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel.

\$130 – 3 meals included in the price.

Sunday, September 10 –

Anacapa Island to Santa Rosa Island through the Santa Rosa Passage to Santa Cruz Island.

12-hour trip departs from the Ventura Marina at 7:00 A.M. on the M/V Vanguard.

Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Pink-footed, Sooty and Black-vented shearwaters; Black, Least and Ashy storm-petrels; cormorants (3); Sabine's Gull; Arctic Tern; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Common Murre; Craveri's and Xantus's murrelets; Cassin's Auklet. Rarities: Buller's shearwater; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger. Leaders: David Koeppel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$70 – galley on board.

Saturday, September 23 –

East end of Santa Catalina Island and out to sea toward San Clemente Island.

12-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 6:00 A.M. on the R/V Vantuna.

This is a new trip, past Santa Catalina Island toward San Clemente Island, which is in the

new alignment of the Los Angeles County pelagic boundaries. (See Western Tanager, Vol. 58 No. 10).

Birds seen at this time of year: Northern Fulmar; Pink-footed, Sooty and Buller's (rare) shearwaters; Black, Ashy and Least storm-petrels; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger; boobies (three in the past). Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel. \$45 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, October 14 –

San Pedro Channel and out to sea toward Santa Barbara Island.

(final destination to be determined by the leaders). 12-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 6:00 A.M. on the R/V Vantuna.

Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Buller's and Pink-footed shearwaters; Black and Ashy storm-petrels; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds; Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets; Xantus's Murrelet. Rarities: Long-tailed Jaeger.

Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel. \$45 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Sunday, November 12 –

San Pedro Channel along the coastal escarpment.

8-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 7:30 A.M. on the R/V Vantuna.

Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Black Storm-Petrel; cormorant (3); Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (5); Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Common Murre; Xantus's Murrelet; Flesh-footed and Buller's shearwaters.

Leaders: David Koeppel and Michael J. San Miguel.

\$30 – tea and coffee, no galley.

FIELD TRIPS

continued from page 12

Saturday-Sunday, January 29-30 – Salton Sea with Nick Freeman.

For Sandhill Cranes and White-faced Ibis, meet up with Nick at Cattle Call Park south of Brawley to **depart at 3:00 P.M. Saturday**. Take Hwy 111S to Brawley, head W through town on Main St., then continue S on Hwy 86 to a fairly quick right on Cattle Call Dr. Continue down around the bend to the fenced grassy area by the arena. Sunday morning we will regroup (and welcome late-comers) at Carl's Jr. at Main and First in Brawley, **leaving there at 7:00 A.M.** A good trip for Canada, Snow and Ross' geese, Burrowing Owl, Gila Woodpecker, Great-tailed Grackle and Yellow-footed Gull. Anticipate mud. Bring lunch, 'scopes and warm clothes. \$5 registration fee at LAAS. No participant limit.

Friday, February 4 –

Gull Study Workshop. Larry Allen will take us beyond the standard plumage reviews of this oft-confusing collection of birds. The important skills of aging and describing a gull by feather groupings will be addressed. Slides, skins and handouts will be used to demonstrate I.D. marks of many common and uncommon gulls of the west coast in their various plumages. Fee: \$5 for workshop and field trip. Reservation with LAAS by check required, as space is limited. See field trip listing below.

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.

*All pelagic trips must be filled
35 days prior to sailing. Please
make your reservations early.*

Sunday, February 6 –

Gull Study Field Trip. Larry Allen will make stops from Malibu Lagoon to McGrath State Beach looking for gulls to demonstrate points made during the Friday workshop (see above). Thayer's Gull likely. We will meet at 8:00 A.M. at the **Malibu Lagoon** parking lot kiosk. Free parking on Cross Creek Rd. located just west of the lagoon bridge. Trip will finish at McGrath State Park in Oxnard. Walk-ons OK for field trip only: Fee: \$3 for field trip. Bring lunch, NGS field guide and 'scopes for a full day.

February 6 – Topanga State Park.

Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See January 2 for write-up.

Sunday February 13 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See January 9 write-up.

Sunday, February 20 –

Ballona Wetlands. Leader **Bob Shanman**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See January 9 write-up.

Saturday-Sunday, April 29-30 – East Mojave Desert Trip with Larry Allen.

Friday June 30-Sunday, July 1 – Southern Sierras Trip with Bob Barnes

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.

WESTERN Tanager

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www.LAAudubon.org

Los Angeles County
Breeding Bird Atlas
(213) 745-BIRD (2473)
<http://www.nhm.org/~lacbba>

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EVENING MEETINGS

January 11, 2000

Kimball Garrett and **Larry Allen** will discuss results from five years of field work on the Breeding Bird Atlas project. Join us for the latest information on our county's bird diversity as revealed by this exciting project.

February 8, 2000 Annual Slide Contest

Slide Contest Rules:

1. Anyone may enter a maximum of five slides they have taken of birds.
2. Photos must be of live, uncaged, birds taken anywhere in the world.
3. Photos will be judged on quality and composition, not on rarity/exoticness of bird.
4. Entrant must have their name on each slide. Check slides in at the door.
5. Prizes will be given for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. Entrant must be present to win.
6. Winning photos will be published in *Western Tanager*. Entry into contest constitutes permission to publish photo in *Western Tanager* and on the LAAS website. Winning slides will be returned to photographer as soon as they are scanned for the *Western Tanager*, other entrants must retrieve their slides after the contest ends.
7. Everyone must have a good time!

MEET AT:

West Hollywood Presbyterian Church

7350 Sunset Blvd.

(southwest corner of Sunset and Martel.)

Limited parking is available south of the church; enter from Martel.

7:30 P.M. - Refreshments in the courtyard.

8:00 P.M. - Program

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, January 2 – 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 biologist is often present. From Ventura Blvd., take Topanga Canyon Blvd. 7 miles S, turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Follow the signs and turn left into the parking lot of Trippet Ranch. \$6 parking fee or park on the road outside the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, January 9 – Whittier Narrows.

Meet **Ray Jillson** at 8:00 A.M. to view colorful resident and migrating birds, including the Northern Cardinal. Take Peck Dr. off the 60 Fwy in South El Monte (just west of the 605 Fwy). Take the off ramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right) and turn left into the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. \$2 donation to Whittier Narrows.

Saturday-Sunday, January 15-16 – Carrizo Plain.

Leader **Roy Van de Hoek** has done extensive field research on the Plain. Meet at 8:00 A.M. in Maricopa. Good trip for hawks, falcons, eagles, and Mountain Plover! Sandhill Crane, elk and pronghorn hopeful. Please carpool or

avail your vehicle to others. \$18 per person, \$10 surcharge for one-person vehicles. Ten car limit. Your phone number will be released for carpooling unless you request otherwise. Sign up with Audubon House with SASE for exact directions and information on motels.

Sunday January 16 –

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

Sunday, January 23 – Antelope Valley Raptors and other wintering Birds.

Jean Brandt will lead us from Quail Lake east across the Antelope Valley. Wear warm clothing, bring lunch, and have a full tank of gas. Meet at Denny's at 6:45 A.M. to carpool. Take 405N to Roxford in Sylmar. Turn right, then right into the Denny's parking lot. Trip leaves at 7:00 A.M.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
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West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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