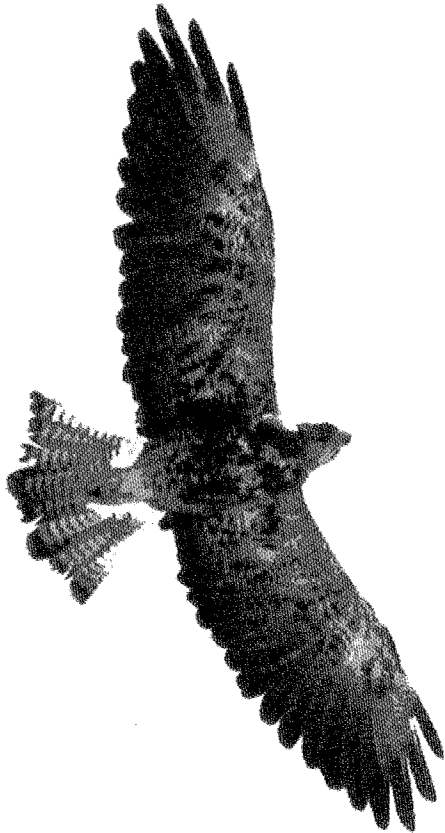


# WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society



## *The Mystery of California's Wintering Swainson's Hawks*

*by Waldo Holt*

**T**his brief account focuses on a small population of Swainson's Hawks that has been wintering in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta near Stockton in California's Central Valley. This extraordinary occurrence has been observed each winter since its discovery by the local birding community a decade ago.

Swainson's Hawks are neo-tropical migrants. They are often observed in huge flocks in migration. They migrate north, funneling through the Isthmus of Panama to breed in western North America during the Boreal Summer. Then they return to South America for the Austral Summer. In South America they reportedly share communal roost sites and forage for

insects in large groups, snatching locusts and dragonflies out of the air and eating them on the wing. Their migration is a long and perilous one that can exceed 12,000 miles round trip. In Argentina, they have recently been reported (Audubon magazine September-October 1996) as

*Adult dark-morph Swainson's Hawk  
photos by Ned Harris*

the victims of pesticide poisoning. While here in California they are faced with another set of problems, perhaps most notable is the loss of foraging habitat which is being converted to non-foraging habitats such as vineyards, orchards, cotton and rice crops, or to urban uses. In California, due to a dramatic reduction in numbers, the Swainson's Hawk is listed as a threatened species. They can still be found breeding in California in some concentration (perhaps 500 pairs) in Sacramento, San Joaquin and Yolo counties.

Generally, Swainson's Hawks can be distinguished from Red-tailed Hawks without too much difficulty: a slight wing dihedral while soaring, as opposed to the flat-wings of the Red-tailed; the Swainson's Hawk's flight feathers are dark on the underwing, the dark patagial mark of the Red-tailed is missing, etc. However, identification between these two species can become more confusing when the observer is confronted with immature or dark-morph birds, and of

son's Hawks should be approached with caution. Even as late as 1983 there was just one valid winter record for a Swainson's Hawk in California – a specimen taken in December 1932 near Merced in the Central Valley.

Back in the mid 1970's a few birders who otherwise appeared to be sane, innocently reported that they had seen some Swainson's Hawks out in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta while birding on the Stockton Christmas Bird Count. These birders might as well have been reporting UFOs as everyone knows that Swainson's Hawks winter in Argentina. Mis-identification of birds can be rampant on Christmas counts, and without any supporting details these sightings were rightly purged from the official CBC tally. Also, while the instance of a single wayward hawk (if properly documented) might be plausible, the report of a group of three together surely was a preposterous sighting. No one followed up; no photos were taken. It was strongly suggested that these befuddled

birders never find Swainson's Hawks on Stockton Christmas counts again.

Then in 1983, David Yee saw a Swainson's Hawk soaring lightly above the bucolic landscape northwest of the city of Stockton – a common sight during the breeding season – but not on the 17th of December! David, being a birder of exceptional ability and knowledge, provided a scrupulous and

reports of out-of-season Swainson's Hawks started popping up in southern and central California: on the coast, in the desert, in the Central Valley. These records were all considered to be either late or early migrants. However, by the late 1980's, a concentration of reports from the central part of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (including a group of nine seen on King Island, 15 January 1989) suggested that a small number of Swainson's Hawks might actually be over-wintering in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

In late October 1990, (while we were trying to track down a report of a Wood Stork to add to our county list), David Yee and I instead found a group of fifteen dark-morph Swainson's Hawks on Bouldin Island in the Delta. David and I decided to investigate the possibility that this was the over-wintering group. From then on throughout that winter David and/or I managed to get out into the Delta on at least a weekly basis. We were almost always able to locate a few Swainson's Hawks on every trip. The largest number we were able to observe at one time was 28. We discovered a roost site where they could be reliably found all winter long. It is a line of eucalyptus trees on the breakwater of a boating marina (Korth's Pirate's Lair) at the southern tip of Andrus Island. The Swainson's Hawks can be seen perching in these trees just before sundown and again in the morning before they go out to forage for a meal. Our observations of that winter confirmed that at least a small group of Swainson's Hawks were not going south to the Pampas of Argentina but were spending the winter in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta 6,000 miles away from where they were expected to be.

We have continued to monitor this phenomenon every winter and have consistently found it to be much the same each year. Repeatedly there is a small number (we have never seen more than 28) of Swainson's Hawks wintering in the Delta. They can be reliably found at the roost site on Andrus Island every winter. They forage in a very localized area around that roost site, primarily: Bouldin Island, Terminous Tract, Venice Island, Empire Tract and vicinity.

There are no swarms of locusts and



*Juvenile light-morph Swainson's Hawk*

course when the views are not good: bad lighting, distant, or brief. Therefore, identification of out-of-season Swain-

unflinching written description of this bird, which proved to be convincing. Following this, a few other trustworthy

dragonflies to feast on in the Delta so instead they spend the day following behind tractors that are discing corn stubble in fields after the corn harvest. They swoop down close to the moving discs and grab a scurrying house mouse with their talons. They can also be seen in disced fields sitting on the ground lying-in-wait or chasing on foot after mice. After they eat a few mice they eventually make their way back to perch in their roost trees. When it is rainy the tractors can't work in the fields and when it is foggy (and it can be very foggy) the hawks cannot see to find a mouse, so they sit tight and wait for better weather.

It is very interesting that the majority of these wintering Swainson's Hawks are completely dark-morph or at least tending to the dark side of the spectrum. The dark-morph of this species is rare in the interior of North America but in California's Central Valley, the dark-morph constitutes fully one third of the breeding population. Either the male or the female can be a dark color, however, it is the female which is almost always the darker member of a pair and thus most of the dark-morph Swainson's Hawks are females. The fact that our wintering hawks were predominantly dark-morph leads us to suspect that they are all females. Also, females are larger than males, which is something that can usually be observed when they are seen together. We have not been able to observe this size difference. Therefore, we think this also suggests that the Delta wintering Swainson's Hawks are likely to all be females.

In the southbound migration as a whole, some Swainson's Hawks can get big-time lost and wind up in southern Florida. Once there, they are reluctant to attempt an over-water crossing so they will spend the winter in Florida. These are almost all first-year immature hawks. Conversely, the Delta group is almost all adults with only one or two in immature plumage. One hawk we have observed had an unusual white mark on its face. This made it easy to identify when it came back in subsequent winters. We believe that this group of adult Swainson's Hawks in the Delta is not "lost" or "having trouble finding their way", which is the case in Florida, rather they are purposely

choosing to come back to winter in the Delta each year. This was a full-blown phenomena that has changed not at all in the past decade; obviously it has been going on longer than ten years. We, however, think it is likely that current farming practices have been an encouraging factor. Corn farming is widespread in the Delta and the timing of harvest

thought that they must be from the Central Valley's breeding stock but we knew that this could never be proved without telemetry evidence to back it up. And it was just by luck, that this was exactly what happened this past winter. Michael Bradbury, who is working on a migration telemetry study of the Central Valley breeding population of Swainson's



*Adult light-morph Swainson's Hawk*

and discing of that crop promote the availability of mice for foraging Swainson's Hawks. But thirty years ago asparagus, tomatoes and potatoes were very common there and these are crops that would not foster a small-rodent prey base in the winter.

Because the numbers we observe fluctuate from week to week, we have always thought that there must be other places relatively near where wintering Swainson's Hawks must also be spending time. There are plenty of other very similar habitats. What could be so special about these cornfields and this stand of eucalyptus trees? However, while there have now been numerous reports of Swainson's Hawks in the winter in California, they are invariably reports of individuals just passing through. The Delta seems to be the only place where a group like this can be reliably found day after day and year after year.

The breeding locale(s) of these wintering hawks has always been a mystery. Many people have thought that they must be nesting somewhere far to the north such as Alaska or the Yukon. David and I

Hawks, called me up in January 1999, to say that one of his Swainson's Hawks (an adult dark-morph female) was sending out a signal from a point just a few miles north and west of Stockton. This hawk had been fitted last June with a satellite-tracked transmitter in Yolo County. This was the evidence that we needed. Michael has found that while some of the Central Valley breeding population migrates all the way south to Argentina, many of them go only as far south as Mexico and now he has discovered that a few winter in the Delta. This is a wintering range that extends an incredible 6,000 miles. This is exciting information. It is always fun to discover something new about birds.

*Waldo Holt (waldoh@juno.com) lives with his wife Sara on Darrah Island near Stockton, CA. He birds primarily in San Joaquin County where he is the conservation chair of the San Joaquin Audubon Society.*





# CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Now that the presidential primary season is far behind us, we're faced with four or five months of hot and heavy campaigning. How do the two major candidates stand on the environment?

George W. Bush, two-term governor of Texas, to put it mildly, scares the pants off a host of environmentalists. The reason is not difficult to understand. Since he was elected in 1994 he has:

- ✓Enthusiastically endorsed "takings" legislation which would require the state to compensate landowners for regulations that decrease their property values. This has been called paying polluters not to pollute.
- ✓Failed to support increased funding for Texas state parks, one of the most neglected park systems in the country.
- ✓Suggested that companies voluntarily reduce industrial emissions rather than passing a law to compel them to do so. Houston recently was declared the most polluted city in the nation, pushing Los Angeles into second place. And the state's oil and chemical plants are notorious for their atmospheric insults.
- ✓Opposed placing rare endemic Texas species on the state endangered species list.
- ✓Has not appointed even one conservationist to any Texas environmental agency. The state Natural Resources and Conservation Commission is composed entirely of members with ties to real estate, oil and chemical interests according to the League of Conservation Voters.
- ✓Vetoed the creation of a reserve for the endangered Texas sea turtle.

However, he does support the existing limited moratorium on offshore oil drilling in California and Florida and

favors an unspecified increase in spending for conservation. He opposes the Kyoto Protocol which would reduce global warming by cutting back on several greenhouse gases.

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Vice President Al Gore has a reputation as an environmentalist based in part by his 1992 best seller, *Earth In the Balance*. The League of Conservation Voters considers Gore "the most knowledgeable environmental advocate to reach such high office in the United States."

- ✓When he was in the House he worked to pass the Superfund bill which was to clean up hazardous waste sites.
- ✓In the Senate in 1991, he filibustered legislation that would have opened up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.
- ✓As Vice President, he persuaded Clinton to designate the 1.7-million acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, an act universally applauded by the environmental community.
- ✓He opposed the high-level radioactive waste dump in Yucca Mt. in Nevada.
- ✓He has been active in the drive to restore the Everglades in Florida.

But Al Gore has not always been the fair-haired boy in this area. Though he has spoken about strengthening the Endangered Species Act, the administration has been accused of doing very little, especially in conserving habitat for wildlife. Gore did not speak out when Clinton signed a bill with a rider forbidding legal challenges to logging sales. Later he seemed to admit it was a wrong

course to take. In 1998 he prevented the Environmental Protection Agency from launching a program to evaluate pesticide use on certain food products.

The question about Gore is just how responsible he may have been for decisions emanating from the White House on the environment. One conservation leader has said, "In general, he hasn't seen through environmental programs as much as we had hoped. We saw him as a champion of environmental causes. I don't know whether we do [so] anymore. But we realize he's in a very difficult position...."




## CONSERVATION NOTES

**NATIONAL MONUMENTS:** The Administration has been pretty good about protecting scarce and valuable habitats around the country and we're rooting for saving the splendid Carizzo Plain here in California. But unfortunately there is still the influence of powerful interests that creeps in to water down the progress. California's Pinnacle National Monument was doubled in size by a presidential order that also permitted the continuation of grazing. Cattle trample desirable vegetation and destroy riparian areas; most national parks and monuments do not allow grazing, but cattle were allowed to remain in Pinnacle because of concern for opposition from local ranchers. One of the ranchers is a multi-millionaire who will continue to pay \$163 a year to graze his cows on 1000 public acres.

**LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND:** This is the fund established when Congress responded to conservation concerns of the public, and \$900 million a year was made available to support the environment nationwide. It wasn't too long before a big portion of the money was siphoned off for other purposes and the excellent goal of the fund was severely compromised. The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (HR701) was introduced in the House which would restore LWCF to its original size. Unfortunately, the majority party seems to be intent on defeating the bill with disastrous amendments like one that would postpone passage until 2006 while the environment goes downhill.

**BILLIONS FOR LAND CONSERVATION:** On May 11, the House passed an incredible bill that would provide almost \$3 billion a year for a nationwide program for environmental enhancement, including acquisition of parkland and open space, recreation, wildlife and endangered species protection – and much more. Remarkably, the bill passed on a 315 to 102 vote including 118 Republicans. The League of Conservation Voters' scorecard, which analyzes environmental votes of Congress, shows that generally, Republicans have far less sympathy for conservation issues than Democrats. Money for the new program will come from offshore oil and gas drilling. How the Senate will respond to the bill remains to be seen, but the powerful reaction of the House may be a big factor in its decision. Puzzle: how can this overwhelming vote be reconciled with the current opposition in the House to HR701 (above) which is far milder?

**ABALONE LISTING:** The National Marine Fisheries Service is proposing that the white abalone be protected under the Endangered Species Act. The Service, salt water equivalent of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, reports that only 2500 of the historic millions of the succulent mollusks remain in the waters along the coast of southern and Baja California. A sobering question: why must we wait for a species to reach the brink of extinction before we try to rescue it? 

# NEW AT THE BOOKSTORE

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**The Bookstore will be closed July 1-4**

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| This completely revised 5th edition lists approximately 9800 species by scientific and English names. Includes subspecies, description of range of each species and subspecies, complete bibliography, gazetteer, distribution tables, endemics by country.<br>Hard cover. Clements, 2000. |         |
| <b><i>BIRDING GEORGIA</i></b>  | \$22.95 |
| An all new guide to best birding locations in Georgia; detailed information on every species found in the state; status and seasonality bar graphs.<br>Soft cover. Beaton, 1999.   |         |
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# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

by Daniel S. Cooper

## The Huntington Library

**T**he Huntington Library, Art Gallery and Botanical Gardens are located in San Marino, roughly 10 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles. Covering less than 300 acres, the lushly-landscaped gardens represent one of the largest green patches on the floor of the San Gabriel Valley. The property is situated on the gently sloping mesa off the San Gabriel Mountains, broken by the Raymond fault, which bisects the gardens east-west. While the vegetation is dominated by exotic plantings, including some specimens with historical significance, a few elements of the native flora remain. The oak woodland in the western portion of the property features Coast Live and Engelmann oaks, California Black Walnut, Toyon and Laurel Sumac. Birds abound throughout the gardens, both in terms of numbers and species diversity. While the birding is slowest in mid-summer, the excitement of migration and regularly occurring wintering vagrants make the Huntington a worthwhile birding spot the rest of the year.

From the 210 Fwy, exit on Hill Ave. in Pasadena. Go south 1 mile to California, east 0.5 mile to Allen. Turn right on Allen and go 2 blocks to Orlando Ave. Turn left 1 block to Oxford, and turn right. After 0.5 mile, look for the entrance to the gardens on your right. The best time to bird the Huntington is on the 2nd Saturday of each month, when the gardens open at 7:45 A.M. (with no entrance fee!) for birders. Otherwise, they are open from Tues-Sun from 10-4; \$8 entrance fee.

### Parking Lot

Yes, the parking lot. Some of the tallest trees on the property are located here, and these winter-blooming eucalyptus attract orioles, tanagers and grosbeaks. Locate a tree in flower, often covered with noisy Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds and Yellow-rumped Warblers, and just wait until something bigger flies in. Or check every odd-looking Yellow-rump until you turn up something good. The well-watered borders of the parking lot should be checked for migrants such as MacGillivray's Warbler and Willow Flycatcher in early fall, and for Common Yellowthroat and Lincoln's Sparrow throughout the winter. The redwoods planted at the south end of the parking lot (near the entrance to the gardens) are reliable for Red-whiskered Bulbul, an introduced species that has become established in the west San Gabriel Valley (check your field guide – it's in there). They are first detected by their loud, robin-like song, delivered from the tops of trees.

### Main Entrance to Desert Section

Entering the gardens, check for orioles in the red-flowering *Erythrina* trees near the buildings, as well as the flowering succulents on the left just before the Desert Section. Both Hooded and Bullock's are present all year, and Baltimore is almost regular in winter. Walk down and to the left into the Desert Section, checking the hole-ridden palms for Acorn Woodpecker, which have maintained a colony here for years. This upper portion of the Desert Section can

be productive for sapsuckers in winter, with Red-breasted being the most common. Introduced Yellow-chevroned Parakeets often feed on the Silk-floss and sycamore trees here. They are joined by Pine Siskin and Purple Finch in some winters. Allen's Hummingbird is abundant year-round, and the high-pitched "zi-i-i-i-ing" of Costa's Hummingbird should also be listened for. During early spring and late summer, this area can be alive with migrant Rufous Hummingbirds. Stick to the Desert Section as you walk down the hill. The Palm Garden and Tropical Section to your right are generally slow.

### Desert Section to Australian Section

Walking west (right) out of the Desert Section, you will pass by several small, bamboo-lined ponds, which usually have a heron or egret. During winter, listen for the lisping "tsip" of Townsend's Warbler in the tall conifers around these ponds. Continuing west into the Australian Section, you should kick up part of a large flock of wintering sparrows. Especially in October and November, check each White-crowned Sparrow for White-throated, each Chipping for Clay-colored, and each Lincoln's for Swamp.

The southern edge of the Australian Section attracts a large number of migrants in spring. Highlights have included a migrant "yellow" Palm Warbler one April and, once in early May, a male Calliope Hummingbird plucking insects off the lawn at my feet! Each week brings different a assortment of species: Townsend's Warbler seems to




peak in late March, Nashville and Orange-crowned warblers in early April, and Wilson's and Black-throated Gray warblers and Pacific-slope Flycatcher later in April. In early May, anything is possible, including good numbers of Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow Warbler, Warbling Vireo and Western Tanager. While walking past overgrown areas (early June), listen for the "water drop" call note of Swainson's Thrush. Nearly all the migrants travel in loose flocks, so listen for their "chip" notes or just look up under the oaks for movement. Fall migration is much more erratic, with birds touching down on overcast mornings.

#### Australian Section to Japanese Garden

Rather than taking the asphalt road up the hill directly to the Japanese Garden, detour to the right through the Subtropical Section, a mercifully messy garden of tropical dry-forest trees and shrubs. Since many of these plants typically bloom in midwinter, this spot is good for wintering Western and Summer (rare) tanagers, along with other Neotropical migrants that would normally be in Mexico by November. The tanagers' clucking calls (upslurred "Pit-er-ik" in Western and downslurred "Kit-i-puk" in Summer) are

often your best clue to their presence. Wilson's and Nashville warblers regularly winter here as well, but are also difficult to detect without listening for their calls. Quiet rustling in the leaf litter may reveal Fox and Golden-crowned sparrows or a small covey California Quail, the latter maintaining a small but apparently stable population in this highly urban setting. Descending into the Japanese Garden, scan the Engelmann Oaks and conifers across the ravine for passerine flocks, particularly during winters where montane invaders like Golden-crowned Kinglet and Red-breasted Nuthatch descend into the Los Angeles Basin. Some pish-ing may be necessary to "wake up" the locals. Wintering birds in this area have included Winter Wren, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Varied Thrush and, amazingly, Dusky-capped Flycatcher. Spring migration, particularly when the oaks are in bloom, can be a spectacle of frantically foraging warblers and vireos in this shady ravine. During the slower summer months, nesting Black-chinned Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo and the occasional singing Swainson's Thrush help to liven things up.

#### Japanese Garden to Mausoleum

Though this stretch has recently hosted a massive construction project, making your way to the mausoleum is an important finale to birding the Huntington. The small orange grove you pass through is the San Gabriel Valley's largest surviving remnant of the citrus orchards that once stretched from Pasadena to Riverside and down through Orange County. Though these fragrant trees made the region famous, their elimination after WWII for housing tracts was swift and final. This remnant grove supports an amazing number of birds, particularly during wet winters when the grass beneath the trees is left uncut. The open habitat also provides good opportunities for hawk-watching (Swainson's Hawk is regular in April), as well as for observing diurnal migrations of things like Western Kingbird and Western Bluebird. At night, Western Screech-Owl forage in the grove, but aside from long streaks of whitewash on the lower boughs of oaks, these strictly nocturnal owls are basically impossible to detect during the day. As with the Japanese Garden, the mature oaks north of the Mausoleum can be alive with migrant and wintering passerines. 

## Planning Workshops Scheduled to Create Baldwin Hills Park

Participate in creating and restoring a great urban park in the heart of Los Angeles. Come to the Baldwin Hills Park Planning workshops this July and help craft the vision for this two-square miles of open space.

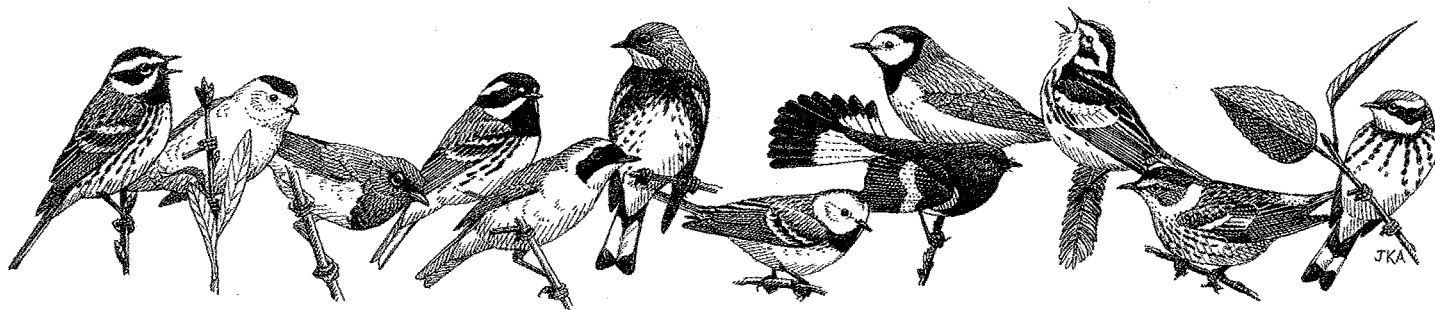
The Baldwin Hills offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to affect large-scale environmental change in the Los Angeles basin. Efforts are currently underway to transform this industrial area into a world class, two-square mile park, recreation and natural area and to substantially restore natural habitat.

The Baldwin Hills are the last, large, undeveloped part of the Ballona Creek watershed and their preservation and restoration will improve natural habitat in the region and water quality in Ballona Creek. Preservation will also provide badly-needed recreation opportunities to the park-poor communities that live within five miles of the Baldwin Hills Park site. By re-connecting the Baldwin Hills to Ballona Creek, the natural path between the hills, wetlands and the ocean can be appreciated and protected.

Community Conservancy International will be hosting a series of planning workshops for interested parties to participate in developing a draft Baldwin Hills Park Plan. Please join us on one of the following dates:

Tuesday,	July 11	Oasis Senior Center, Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw Plaza
Thursday,	July 13	Community Room, Inglewood City Hall
Saturday,	July 15	Park View Community Church, Baldwin Hills
Tuesday,	July 25	Wilfandel House, West Adams/Jefferson Park
Thursday,	July 27	Community Room, Culver City Fox Hills Mall
Saturday,	July 29	Rotunda Room, Culver City Veteran's Center

For further information please contact David McNeill at (310) 475-0797 x3 or e-mail [dfmcneill@earthlink.net](mailto:dfmcneill@earthlink.net).



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Kimball L. Garrett

**T**he latest checklist of the birds of Los Angeles County has been compiled reflecting a few species added in recent years as well as some sequence and species-level changes from the *American Ornithologists' Union Checklist of North American Birds* (7th ed.), published in 1998. (For a complimentary copy of our checklist, send a self-addressed, stamped legal size envelope to: LAAS Checklist, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694).

I won't be so bold as to predict that the coming fall will see some more additions to this county checklist (and certainly not so foolish as to predict which ones those might be). But the period from July through September is one that often produces unusual shorebirds and seabirds, and the list of potential vagrant landbirds from September through November is astonishingly large. You readers should therefore be champing at the proverbial bit to cover the county thoroughly in the coming months to find (and document, document, document!!!) asterisked birds or even species new to the county.

The most unusual bird in southern California this spring was the adult male **Black-backed** (or "**Abeille's**") **Oriole** (*Icterus abeillei*) discovered by Gjon Hazard, John Hunter and Dave Solis at "Smuggler's Gulch" in the Tijuana River Valley near Imperial Beach, San Diego Co., on 9 April. It continues to be seen repeatedly by numerous observers as of 23 May. Although initially dismissed as an escaped cage bird, there are some lines of evidence that suggest the potential for vagrancy in this species. The oriole has thus earned a place solidly in the twilight

zone already occupied by such species as Blue Mockingbird and Gray Silky-Flycatcher, i.e. potentially a natural vagrant, but also potentially human-assisted. With a mix of vagrancy from all directions plus a thriving legal and illegal avicultural market in California and nearby Mexico, birding life is never dull here in the Southland, and there is no shortage of controversies.

Two different **Laysan Albatrosses** were found ashore this spring. One was found in Baldwin Park in the San Gabriel Valley on 1 April (no fooling!) and released a couple of days later near Newport by a bird rehabilitator (fide Dan Guthrie).

Another was found in San Pedro on 30 April or 1 May and taken into rehab. The San Pedro bird might have ridden a ship into harbor, the likely explanation for the numerous other onshore Laysans near major California shipping ports. The Baldwin Park bird could conceivably have entered California up the Salton Trough from the Gulf of California, eventually working its way westward through Banning Pass; however, the early spring date argues against this, as other such occurrences have mainly been in May and June.

A **White-headed Duck** (a local and declining European species resembling a large Ruddy Duck with a nearly all white head and swollen bill) was reported by Russell Stone at the south end of the Salton Sea on 22 April; if correct (the bird was not refound), this record must certainly pertain to an escapee. A female Hooded Merganser was at Madrona Marsh on 31 March (Dave Moody).

Very unusual was a **Surfbird** at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds, found independently on 13 May by Kevin Larson and Mike San Miguel. It was still present on 21 May and represents only the second record from that region of the state (Richard Webster photographed another Surfbird at the same sewage ponds on 8 May 1982). When the spring winds whip up the water on the Lancaster Sewage Ponds I suppose it's reminiscent of the surf zone on a coastal breakwater, but only somewhat. **Franklin's Gulls** were much in evidence this spring. Kevin Larson recorded them at Pt. Vicente on 15 April, Ballona Creek on 30 April, and Piute Ponds on 13 May. One was at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on 25 April

**R**ecords 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: yoohoray@cs.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



(Steve Sosensky), and two second-year birds were at Rosamond Lake on 21 May (Kimball Garrett and Mike San Miguel).

A singing **Blue-headed Vireo** was at Huntington Beach Central Park on 13 May (Doug Willick). A **Palm Warbler** on the bluffs near Loyola Marymount University on 16 April was thought to be of the eastern "yellow" subspecies *hypochrysea* (Russell Stone). An adult male Baltimore Oriole was at Pt. Vicente on 16 April (Kevin Larson).

## Wanted in L.A. County

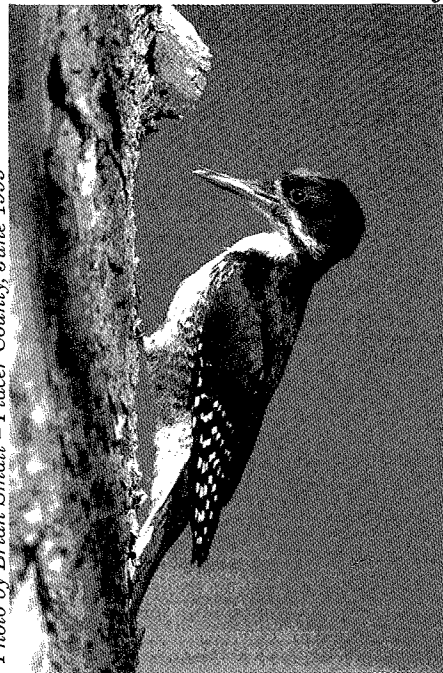


Photo by Brian Small - Placer County, June 1999

A reported **Black-backed Woodpecker** at Buckhorn Campground in the San Gabriel Mountains on 23 April (Steve Sosensky, and Ian, Gavin and Joanne Platt) could not be relocated. With two other San Gabriel Mountains reports by experienced observers in the past 15 years, one wonders what the explanation for such sightings might be. This species is unknown south of the Sierra Nevada of Tulare County in California, and is not known to undergo any significant movements in its California range.

Finally, in the exotics department, a pair of **Lilac-crowned Parrots** appeared to be nesting in conifers at Mt. Wilson in May (Mike Bradford); there have now been several reports of this species (native to western Mexico) in the montane forests above the San Gabriel Valley during the breeding season. 🐦

# LAAS Tours

FOR THIS YEAR (2000) space is still available for:

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

**NAMIBIA** – (extension) – September 17–25, 2000

**EGYPT and KENYA** – (main tour) – November 18–December 5, 2000 and

**THE RED SEA and THE SINAI** (extension) – December 4–9, 2000

## **BOTSWANA – (main tour) February 2–March 9, 2001**

Led by Olga Clarke and Geoff Lockwood, one of South Africa's most popular guides and lecturers.

We will explore this little known and magnificent land of untamed beauty, beginning with a flight over the vast Okavango Delta, the world's largest inland delta covering an area of 4,000 square miles. Seasonally-flooded marshes and lagoons, dry woodlands and grassy savannas support an incredible amount of free-roaming herds of animals and the prey that follow them. Birdlife is prolific with over 550 species found in the region. We will travel by chartered aircraft, open four-wheel-drive vehicles, mokoro, and even on foot.

## **ZIMBABWE – (extension) March 8–17, 2001**

Leaving Botswana, we enter Zimbabwe, spending two nights near Victoria Falls overlooking the Zambezi River. Inland, in this unspoiled paradise, you'll find vast herds of game, including the magnificent Sable Antelope and other wildlife that congregate alongside waterbirds of every description. Victoria Falls is indeed one of Africa's treasures. Here, spray from the falls has created a rainforest where we can see Heuglin's Robin, Schalow's Lourie, Natal Francolin, Trumpeter Hornbill and Terrestrial Bulbul. We'll continue by light aircraft to Hwange National Park and to other regions, with game drives early in the mornings and late afternoons to view game and observe an impressive variety of bird life.

For more information, contact:

Olga Clarke, Travel Director

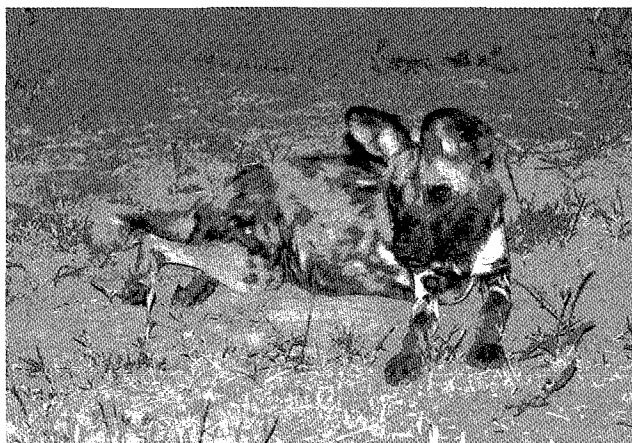
2027 El Arbolita Drive

Glendale, CA 91208

Ph/fax: (818) 249-9511

e-mail: oclarketravel@earthlink.net

www.LAAudubon.org



## L.A. Audubon Society Shorebird Workshop

Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn, lecturers  
Sunday, August 27, 2000 1-7 P.M.

This workshop will address large and small sandpipers (from curlews to peeps), and their allies (plovers, phalaropes, etc.), concentrating on the commonly encountered I.D. problems, as well as "code four" rarities. Depending on their starting point, some birders will be happy to finish with a mastery of the ever present "Western vs. Least" quandary, while the identification comfort level of others will be boosted a rung to "Western vs. Semipalmated". Some will probably walk away feeling that they *would* notice and *could* I.D. a Little Stint if one presented itself.

The workshop will begin with an overview on how to approach difficult identifications. An understanding of feather topography, behavior, and aging techniques is often more critical than usual in identification of shorebirds. Certainly, there is nothing like time in the field to hone I.D. skills, but it can be difficult to develop a feel for feather groups and rare species when good models are uncooperative or absent. This is when the lecture format is indispensable.

Kimball is the Ornithology Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Jon leads field trips to Alaska, Thailand and many other places for WINGS, and has amassed a vast knowledge of the world's shorebirds along the way. Both men have authored or edited important works (together and apart) on status and distribution of birds and on their identification, and both are presently on the California Bird Records Committee.

The workshop is from 1 P.M. until 7 P.M., and includes two coffee – cookie breaks, so arrive well fed!

To reserve, send your phone number and a \$30 check made out to LAAS with a SASE for further details.

Mail to: LAAS Bookstore  
c/o Millie Newton  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd  
West Hollywood, CA 90046.

## NEW

*Field List of the BIRDS  
of LOS ANGELES COUNTY*

For a complimentary copy send a self-addressed, stamped legal size envelope to:

LAAS Checklist  
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.  
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694  
or  
[www.LAAudubon.org](http://www.LAAudubon.org)

## Western Field Ornithologists' 25th Annual Meeting and 30th Anniversary Celebration

Kern River Valley, California  
Wednesday – Sunday, July 5-9, 2000.  
Meeting will be locally hosted by staff and volunteers with Audubon-California's Kern River Preserve. It is open to anyone interested in the interface of western birding and western field ornithology. More information? Check the WFO website: [www.wfo-cbrc.org](http://www.wfo-cbrc.org) or contact:

Bob Barnes  
PO Box 953, Weldon, CA 93283  
E-mail: [bbarnes@lightspeed.net](mailto:bbarnes@lightspeed.net)  
Phone: (760) 378-3044  
FAX: (760) 378-4013.

### 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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*Western Tanager* subscription rates for non-members are \$9 per year for third class delivery or \$15 per year for first class delivery. LAAS members may receive first class delivery by paying an additional \$5. Make check payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

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(323) 876-7609 – fax  
(323) 874-1318 – bird tape  
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[www.LAAudubon.org](http://www.LAAudubon.org)

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# PELAGIC TRIPS

**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 Nicolas 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.

**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, 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 Sundown.

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 Koepfel 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 WT, Vol. 58 No. 10).

Birds seen 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; Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (5); Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Common Murre; Xantus's Murrelet; Flesh-footed and Buller's shearwaters.

Leaders: David Koepfel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$30 – tea and coffee, no galley.

## What's in Debs Park for You?

Debs Park, a 195-acre urban wilderness, off the Pasadena Fwy near downtown Los Angeles, is the proposed site for Audubon's Los Angeles Nature Center. It is a unique public/private partnership which brings together the community, Audubon and the City of Los Angeles to develop a model, urban environmental education facility. Working together, they plan to restore and enhance the park's unique natural landscape; build a community Nature Center with trails and gardens; and provide year-round opportunities for local families to enjoy the out-of-doors. The Nature Center hosts monthly bird walks. Call (323) 254-0252 for more information.

# EVENING MEETINGS

No evening meetings in July and August.

The Los Angeles Audubon Society Bookstore and Library will be open normal hours.

## 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.*

**Friday – Monday, June 30 to July 3 – Southern Sierras Weekend** with **Bob Barnes**. Likely: Northern Goshawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pileated Woodpecker and owls. 140-150 species seen each year. Participation limited. For information flyer, reserve with SASE. Fee: \$15 for each day attended (\$60 for 4 days). Reserve rooms early.

**Sunday, July 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 south, turn east 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, July 9 – Big Bear Lake Vicinity.** Leaders **Nick** and **Mary Freeman**. Meet in the Aspen Glen Picnic Area parking lot in Big Bear at 8:00 A.M. Take Hwy 18 or Hwy 38 to Big Bear Lake, then proceed about half way along the south side of the lake on Hwy 18 and turn south on Tulip Lane. The lot will be on the southwest side of this short street. Target birds include Williamson's Sapsucker, Calliope and Rufous hummingbirds and mountain finches. It should be warm and there may be bugs, so come prepared. Bring lunch. Barbeque at Nick's condo at 5 P.M. for those interested.

**Saturday, July 15 – San Gabriel Mountains.** Leader **Dan Cooper** will take us along the Angeles Crest Hwy for mountain birding. Probable Mountain Quail, Dusky and Olive-sided flycatchers, White-headed Woodpecker and Green-tailed Towhee. Take the 210 Fwy and exit at the Angeles Crest Hwy. Head north for about 200 feet and park on the right. We will then group to carpool. Bring water and lunch. Meet 8:00 A.M.

**Saturday – Monday, July 15-17 – Yosemite.** Leader **David Yee**. Saturday and Sunday in Yosemite and Monday in Owens Valley. Limited to 14 participants. Reserve with SASE and \$15 for each day to LAAS to receive info/motel flyer. Plan to room in Oakhurst Friday night. Your name and phone number will be available to car-poolers, unless you request otherwise.

**Sunday August 6 – Topanga State Park.** Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See July 2 for write-up.

**Sunday, August 13 – Sweltering Salton Sea.** Leader **Nick Freeman**. Anticipate 95-115 degrees F, sewer stench and dust-a-plenty. Don't show up without lots of water (1 gallon each), good health and a reliable car with AC. This is the gauntlet of southern California birding. So why come? We should see Yellow-footed and Laughing gulls, Wood Stork, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Black Tern, Lesser Nighthawk, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker and possibly Least Bittern and Stilt Sandpiper. Perhaps most exciting is the possibility for real rarities such as Brown and Blue-footed boobies, Magnificent Frigatebird, and even stranger stuff that has popped up in August. Limit 8 paid cars with two or more each. Singles will be wait-listed until they can carpool. Send \$5 with a SASE per vehicle to LAAS to reserve, and for the mailer with general, lodging and meeting details. Meet in Brawley at **6:00 A.M.** and bird until 1:00 P.M. or so.

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