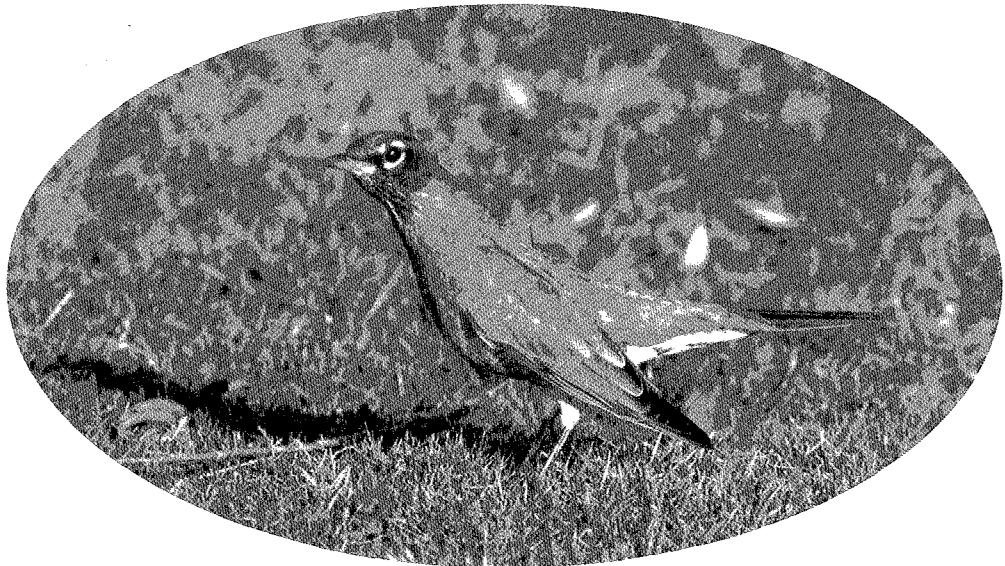


WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society



Where Have All My Robins Gone?

by Hartmut S. Walter

Photo by Brian Small

I really like the American Robin. A pretty bird, a bit clumsy, unpretentious, an ordinary singer, a bird for earthworms and other natural items. In sum, a good bird to have in your neighborhood. But what if they suddenly vanish? That has happened to me in West L.A. and on the UCLA campus. I am troubled by this vanishing act and fear that it may not be due to chance. Could it be an indicator of something big?

There is nothing really special about my neighborhood. It is 100% residential, has solid family homes, and a mixture of senior and young residents. It has a strong homeowner's association and has successfully prevented any major zoning

change for more than 50 years. There are no apartments, and remodeling is confined to a maximum 30 foot-high roof. There are no alleys and the houses are set back some 25 feet from the curb. The well-known Spot Satellite map of the L.A. basin shows my neighborhood as a greenish patch – greener than any other comparable middle class area in West Los Angeles. This is because there is so much lawn and tree-covered space around the buildings that it looks like a park from outer space. That's probably one reason why there were always Robins here during the breeding season. I saw them every day during walks with my dachshund "Topa" (named after the

famous condor Topatopa). I got attached to them. They were my Robins! But now they are gone.

I am writing this essay to solicit your advice and comment in case you have experienced similar happenings in your neighborhood. Can we make sense of losses and gains among our backyard birds? For most of the past century we thought that continental faunas were pretty stable. But today we know that there is a relatively constant coming and going of bird species between habitats and between regions. Regional climates have changed, and habitats have changed. So why shouldn't the urban bird fauna also experience these changes? After all,

our cities are examples of extraordinary change. So, the Robin may just be an example of quite ordinary change. But what prompted this change? Before we get to this question we must first document when and where the change has occurred.

All over the country, members of the Audubon Society have participated in an annual Breeding Bird Census (BBC) for many decades. The results used to be published in Audubon Field Notes, and later in American Birds. To census urban birds is complicated by the fact that there are different habitats and resources for birds in residential, commercial and park-like settings. A good residential census tract should be fairly homogenous and minimize the edge effect from surrounding non-residential habitats. That is tough in most of L.A. because business streets intersect residential areas every four blocks or so. I started censusing a residential neighborhood in Burbank for a number of years in the 1970's then switched to my own neighborhood in the 1980's and have continued to do so at irregular intervals. Here is what I have found: there used to be four to six Robin pairs in my neighborhood. The last Robin that was seen there was in June 1998. I am walking Holmby Park in Westwood (a rare beauty of a park: no team sports!) and the Sculpture Garden at UCLA every day. No more Robins! Hopefully, they are still in many other places in L.A. County (the forthcoming Bird Atlas will tell) but that is not the point. Why, after more than 25 years of being a part of my daily environment, have they vanished? Other birds have increased: there are more House Sparrows, Northern Mockingbirds, Mourning Doves and American Crows. There are recent invaders: Allen's Hummingbird has colonized all of western L.A. County in the last five years. In some places, it is tough to find an Anna's Hummingbird today. There are still House Finches, Bushtits, Scrub Jays and some migrant Western Tanagers. But the invader of a century ago, the Spotted Dove, has become rare as well. Is there possibly a link between Robins and Spotted Doves? We will now consider a number of possible causal or contributing factors, one at a time.

There are too many cats outside, day and night. I commend our mayor and the

American Humane Society for trying to reign in the cats poaching birds across America. Neighbors tell me of Robins being easily caught by these furry pets that should stay indoors. Spotted Doves are possibly their victims as well; they are tamer than Mourning Doves and may not rebuild destroyed nests as often as the latter. As far as I know, both Robins and Spotted Doves locate their nests near the center (trunk) of a tree or shrub, more so than the other birds. But . . . the cats have always been there.

The exotic roof rat invaded our neighborhood some twenty years ago. Could that be a factor? Improbable, because there are other nocturnal mammal predators in most places where Robins live.

There are more raptors in West L.A. In addition to kestrels and buteo hawks there is now also a Cooper's Hawk breeding here. The latter is an exceptional bird hunter and very fond of doves! Again, Robins have coexisted with these raptors for millennia, and there are more Mourning Doves this year than ever before!

There is a definite squirrel plague around here. This is the Eastern Fox Squirrel, an introduced mammal that has become cozy with my neighbors. And squirrels are more abundant today than in the past. They have no natural predators in the urban landscape. Unfortunately, they eat more than peanuts: all kinds of garden fruit, flower buds, bird eggs and nestlings! Plus trash, leftovers from lunch, etc. But people love them! In this context, may I be forgiven a short detour and tell you a true story: in UCLA's Sculpture Garden there are many statues and many visiting tourists. Among them are the French. Their tour guide leads them to this spot on campus. Why? Once in a while, I ask my students this very question. Invariably, some burly male student will answer: "They probably want to see the sculpture of this...ugh...nude superwoman!" Giggles all around but that's not what draws French tourists to this beautifully designed park. Can you believe it, the French come to see and photograph our squirrels!! Apparently, French parks don't even have these lousy tree rats. Back to the Robins. So, here is the first factor that could be responsible for the demise of my neighborhood Robins. But there is more.

There are the crows. People call me

from everywhere about them. How do we get rid of them? They are in Tokyo, they are in New York. My data show that this noisy bird has vastly increased in West L.A. in the last couple of years. A really intelligent pesky opportunist that takes on the squirrel, the occasional opossum, and everything else. A crow could find the Robin's nest and snatch its fledglings! The crow is the little cousin of the masterful Raven, the 'wolf-bird' according to scientist and author Bernd Heinrich who offers some astonishing Raven feats in his book *Mind of the Raven* (highly recommended reading). Yet, there are few or no crows at UCLA and the Robins there have still disappeared.

Another pest species is a tiny ant, the billions of Argentine ants crawling everywhere near walls, buildings, and investigating everything, I mean everything. This colonial species has gradually eliminated other ant species and reduced arthropod diversity in many coastal sage scrub habitats of southern California. That could mean fewer food items and options for Robins and Spotted Doves.

Finally, there is a chemical change that has occurred in the local environment. It has to do with our gardening practices. Most of us like lawns, flowers, shrubs, and a few trees in our front- and backyards. We have always used snail poison. Recently, an additional and more insidious chemical has found many buyers that may endanger our Robins: nurseries, hardware and garden stores sell several kinds of lawn fertilizer mixed with insect control agents. Recently, I went to a neighborhood store to check the labels of four different brands of "turf builders". Here is what they list and advertise:

1. Scotts Turf Builder with Insect Control - Contains 3.2% Diazinon and kills ants, armyworms, Bermudagrass mites, billbugs and eight other bugs, crickets, cutworms, earwigs, leafhoppers, sod webworms, vegetable weevils, and white grubs (4 sp.).

2. Ortho Dursban Lawn & Garden Insect Control - Active Ingredient: Chloryrifos 1%. Similar list of victims.

3. Ortho Diazinon Soil & Turf Insect Control - Active Ingredient: Diazinon 5%. Similar list of critters destined for the afterlife.

4. Bayer Advanced Garden - Lawn

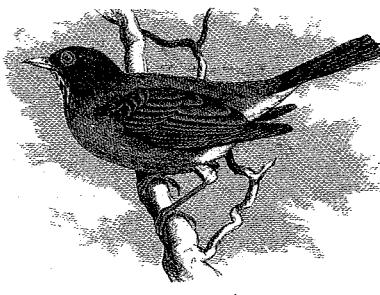
& Garden Multi-Insect Killer - Active Ingredient: Cyfluthrin 0.1%. The name says it all: multi-insect killer!

This inspection alarmed me. Tiny concentrations of obviously powerful chemicals mixed in with fertilizers will basically eliminate our neighborhood's lawn and soil fauna. No wonder, the Robins are gone. They either starved on our manicured but sterile lawns or they burned their sensitive tissues while foraging on the lawn (humans are advised to wear gloves when handling these chemicals), or both of the above.

So, take your pick. Is it the squirrels, the Argentine ant, or is it the turf builder with insect control? I bet on all three but cannot prove it at this time. A series of cleverly designed experiments will be necessary to test for each and all of the variables mentioned here. It would surely be easier to analyze all this if we could compare our neighborhood to one free of cats, squirrels, ants, and garden insect killers. But that would be paradise for my Robins as well as for any urban birdwatcher. In the meantime, help make the real world safer for Robins and all other songbirds in your neighborhood by the following proactive measures: keep cats inside, reduce ant colonies, discourage squirrels (don't feed them), and let the lawn critters live! Your Robins will thank you. ■

Note: The above article was written before the recent action taken by the EPA banning a substantial number of the chemicals mentioned above. A recent Audubon Magazine issue ("The Killer in Your Backyard", Page 108, May-June 2000) also had an article relating bird casualties in eastern cities due to pesticide applications. I welcome reader's reactions at my email address: walter@geog.ucla.edu

Dr. Walter is a Professor of Geography at UCLA.



Turdus migratorius.

Volunteer Your Time and Energy at Los Angeles Audubon

Volunteers make the difference. There are many things to do at Los Angeles Audubon; some are simple, some complex. Volunteer as much or as little time as you can spare, but please volunteer! Just take a look through the suggestions below, pick a task that fits your talents and call us, we need you!

Promote Los Angeles Audubon Chapter and Activities.

Assist at tables when we attend festivals, shows, employee fairs, etc., passing out information on LAAS activities and membership.

Assist with mailings to promote membership. Help keep membership pamphlets and Audubon information in the libraries of our area. Call new members, invite them to meetings. Help advertise our activities and meetings. National Audubon has decided that with the development of offices in each state and maintaining Nature Centers they need more funding. The small portion of dues that is currently passed on to the chapter is being reduced as of January 2001. It is increasingly important we recruit members at the chapter level. Any ideas you have will be welcome, and any time you can spend working on this will be very much appreciated.

Share your knowledge of birds and nature: assist with Audubon Adventures program administration, classroom recruitment, etc. Give some beginning bird-watching or bird identification classes. Share your knowledge with beginners. Help develop educational information, games, crosswords, for our website and handouts. Lead a field trip or bird walk. If you have interest in this but don't feel confident leading on your own, help our current leaders or co-lead. Give, or help develop, presentations for groups, classrooms, scout troops, camping programs, etc.

Armchair Activist: This program is going through some changes at the National level but we are still looking for a volunteer to administer and promote this program when it gets rolling again (soon).

Administration only takes about one evening a month, promotion as much time as you want to spend!

Programs: We still need a program chairperson. This does not take a lot of time and training; suggestions are available. Help set up our meeting room and clean up after monthly meetings. Give a monthly general meeting presentation. Some of our best meetings last year were given by members who are not public speakers. Show us your slides, tell us about your trip and share your experiences.

Bookstore: Our bookstore is always looking for help, especially on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Conservation: We often get calls that require immediate help, such as watching over nests, cleaning up an area, shoveling dirt to protect an area etc. These usually require action within a few days. We would like to have a list of members we can contact to help. Please let us know if you are interested in being notified when these projects come up.

Help with yearly contribution bookkeeping (if you can balance your checkbook you can do this). This is a once a year project that lasts about a month, requires only a 2-3 day commitment. Help assemble contribution kits. This is also only once a year and lasts about a week.

Commitments on a per-day basis. Please call: (323) 876-0202 Tuesday – Saturday, or e-mail: laas@LAAudubon.org.

We need you and will put your talents to work.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

NOTES:

RIDLEY'S SEA TURTLES NESTING A SUCCESS. Sea turtles have a sorry history of oppression by humans who steal their eggs and slaughter the adults for food. Hatchlings are preyed upon by raccoons, gulls and fish as they sprint down the beach and into the ocean. In recent years volunteers have staked out the endangered Ridley's nesting areas and protected them from predators, human and animal. On Mexico's gulf coast last year, 3875 nests were protected and by June of this year 5260 were saved with a possible goal of 6000.

CONSERVATION AND THE MILITARY. The Department of Defense manages about 25 million acres of public lands harboring 220 federally recognized endangered and threatened species, the highest concentration of protected species on any federal lands. Environmental groups have said that until recently the Department has paid very little attention to its responsibility and is still not doing enough to protect wildlife.

DIESELS UNDER THE GUN. Two years ago, a coalition of environmental organizations brought suit against four major California food markets asserting the widely accepted belief that their diesel trucks' exhaust, including deadly particulates, was a potent health hazard. No warning had ever been given to their surrounding communities or their own employees about the possible carcinogenic effect on their lungs. After air samples, some collected late at night when the trucks were unloading (and frequently with motors idling), the courts were convinced of the evidence and changes

were ordered. The markets agreed to buy a total of 150 alternative-fuel trucks, build three natural gas refueling stations and distribute 25,000 flyers to their employees and to local residents explaining the dangers of diesels.

SUPREME COURT PROTECTS GRAZING LIMITS. Cattlemen asked the Court to return to the 1934 regulations on the number of cattle permitted to graze on public lands. They objected to the 1995 revision that cut back the numbers. The Court upheld the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to control grazing on public property.

NOISE BARRAGE THREATENS WHALES. Marine biologists warn that seismic explosions by oil and gas exploration companies and US Navy underwater sonar tests are suspect in strandings of several species of whales. Most of the private companies involved have no requirements for environmental impact assessments.

NAVY SUSPENDS SONAR TESTS. The US Marine Mammal Commission has joined environmental groups in asking for an investigation of the effects of sonic explosions on whales and other marine mammals, citing possible burst eardrums and harmful changes in behavior. The Navy cancelled a planned sonar project off the coast of New Jersey. (Great, now let's hear from the oil and gas companies.)

ACTIVISTS OPPOSE SIERRA LOGGING. Environmental activists of the Yuba Nation have blockaded the main

road into a big logging operation on the Yuba River in the Sierra Nevada. They accuse huge Sierra Pacific Industries of excessive clearcuts and intensive logging leading to destruction of old growth habitat and threats to the Northern Goshawk, the Pacific fisher and the California Spotted Owl.

ARSENIC AND OLD LAWS. The Natural Resources Defense Council, possibly the most effective environmental organization in the country, is suing the EPA for relying on an outdated standard for arsenic in tap water. The Office of Management and Budget is also being sued by NRDC for blocking EPA's efforts to establish up-to-date standards. Since 34 million Americans are drinking arsenic-tainted tap water it would appear essential to clean up tap water rather than forcing people to buy the bottled stuff.

WORLD-WIDE EXPLOITATION THREATENS ENVIRONMENT.

A United Nation report says, "Growing demand for resources is threatening the world's environment more than ever." 20% of fresh-water fish are gone or in danger, half of the world's forests are destroyed and 9% of all tree species are near the vanishing point. And 40% of all the world's fish are over-fished.

CONGRESSIONAL CABAL PLANS TO DITCH CONSERVATIONISTS. Congressman John T. Doolittle (R, CA) feels that when the Republicans win the presidency the new administration should have "a list of Executive Orders and rule changes" ready "to enact imme-

diately to go on the offensive against the extreme environmentalists."

Doolittle says he doesn't merely want to "reverse the damage" but "to enable the executive branch to work its will to counter the entire movement and undercut their sources of power." "We should promote our own vision of proper stewardship of God's green earth." (O brave new world that has such people in it!)

NEW SPECIES FOR SALE. Some earnest German taxonomists, aware that new species of flora and fauna are being discovered every year but frequently disappear before they can be cataloged, decided to do something about it. They created "Patrons for Biodiversity" and offered the rights to name a species for a minimum fee of \$2500. The non-profit group uses the money to fund research. In the first four months twenty species were named. If this quixotic movement catches on, some of the estimated 15,000 organisms that are lost each year because they're unclassified, and therefore unprotected, may survive.

* * *

CONSERVATION 2000. In response to a few readers who wondered why third party candidates' views on the environment had been excluded from the previous issue of the *Tanager*, the following is submitted:

Pat Buchanan, the presumptive Reform candidate, is so eloquent in his opposition to abortion, homosexuality, racial integration, the welfare state, the minimum wage and foreign aid, that he spends little time fulminating on the environment. However, he does advocate opening the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling and is enthusiastic about the expanding the use of nuclear power.

Green Party candidate Ralph Nader talks of "environmental violence" where 65,000 Americans die every year from air pollution and 100,000 Americans die from occupational toxic exposures, and "environmental racism" where the poor, and their often asthmatic children, live in pollution sinks. 

Time flies . . .

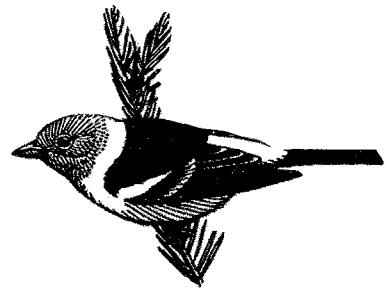
... when you are having fun. And I am having fun! Last year was a blast.

As Editor of *Western Tanager* for six years (from October 1990 to July/August 1996), I had cajoled, bribed and imposed on all of my friends for articles and photographs and I was running out of steam. Fred Heath expressed an interest in becoming editor again and I jumped at the offer. Well, Fred took a job in Switzerland after three years as editor and when no one else came forward to take the helm, certain people, who shall remain nameless, prevailed on me to become editor once again. I couldn't say no; I realized that I like being editor.

Tom Frillman served as co-editor with Fred and did all of the desktop publishing. Tom is a very dear friend and I was eager to work with him. We have had a good year and I thank him from the bottom of my heart for all of the hard work he puts into making the *Tanager* look the way it does and for keeping me sane. It is an ongoing learning process for me and Tom is a good teacher.

Kimball Garrett is the "Lord High Everything Else" (remember *The Mikado*?) and I can't do without him. Although his job at the L.A. County Museum leaves little time for a life of his own, he never turns down a plea for help. He writes the *Birds of the Season* column and generously takes the time to check each issue for possible ornithological *faux pas*. His "punny" sense of humor notwithstanding, he is very special to me and I thank him for his ongoing support and friendship.

Sandy Wohlgemuth has written *Conservation Conversation* for so many years I can't keep count. Where would we be without Sandy to keep us so eloquently alerted and active? Thanks, Sandy; you are a good friend too.



Many other friends have contributed to the *Tanager* this past year. (Do you see the connection? I am once again relying on my friends. My motto is: if you can't impose on your friends then who can you impose on?)

Brian Small generously scans the photos for each issue and is always happy to let us use one of his great slides to illustrate an article. Brian and Mimi Small have recently given us permission to use the Arnold Small Slide Archives – a wonderful resource for the *Tanager*.

Michael San Miguel, Jr. writes *Off the Beaten Track* and directs us to his favorite birding spots.

Phil Sayre has scheduled LAAS pelagic trips for as long as I can remember and is probably responsible for getting more people life birds than anyone else I know.

Mari Johnson schedules our wonderful field trips and has mastered the computer just for us.

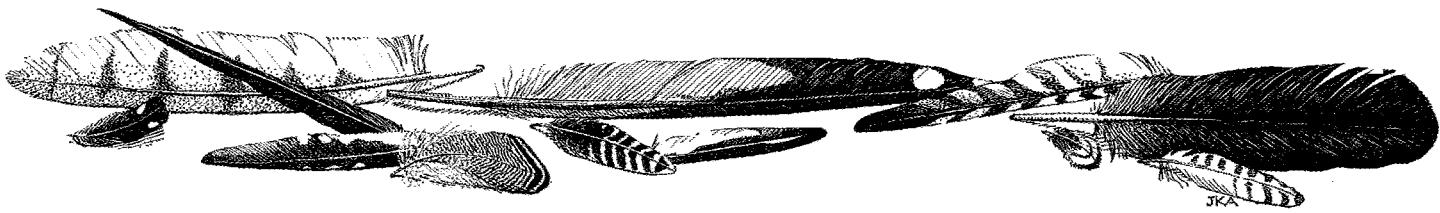
Karen Johnson sends in *Bookstore News*, keeping us up to date on the latest birding books.

John Schmitt is our "artist in residence". He drew the banner for *Off the Beaten Track* and the feather sketches that are found in every issue – lovely additions to the *Tanager*.

There are many other friends who have contributed this past year and I truly appreciate all of their efforts.

A very deep and heartfelt thanks to you all . . . my friends.

Jean



PERSONAL HIGH

Families: the Unending Quest

by Jim Oetzel

How does an addiction start? It all began innocently enough, with a casual interest in looking at birds, and then joining the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Exposure to Arnold Small, Herb and Olga Clarke, Jean Brandt, Kimball Garrett, and many others, was awesome and inspiring. In addition, local field trips offered a chance to be with Audubon members who were happy to share their knowledge.

Listing started slowly, with sightings recorded on scraps of paper that were misplaced and more often than not, lost. The publication of Jim Clements' *Birds of the World: A Checklist* in 1974 proved to be a godsend. Finally there was a place to systematically list birds and record locations and dates.

Local birding trips gradually expanded to trips throughout the USA – always striving to reach that magic number of 600 species for North America. The next step was birding overseas. Travel at that time was part of my work, and I now had an additional aim, to visit the high bird count areas of the world. I spent my free time overseas visiting swamps, garbage dumps, sewage disposal ponds and anywhere birds were to be found. I had become an ardent “lister”.

After several frantic high-count trips, I began to realize that too many of the birds were only a blur in my memory. I had reached a plateau and became aware that neither I, nor anyone else, would see them all. Somewhere along the line, a friend suggested seeking all of the world's bird families. It took some

time for the idea to take root, but the realization that this was an attainable goal gave a new impetus to birding.

Chasing the bird families was not very popular when I began my quest. Fewer than ten male and no female listers included their bird family sightings on the 1983 American Birding Association (ABA) survey. Sometime later, that category was even deleted. (Recently there has been a resurgent interest in listing bird families. Just last year, the English birders Harry Howard and Derek Scott saw all the bird families in one

ly. In his summary of his search for the bird families, Peter Kaestner recommended the *American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) Checklist* by Bock and Farrand (1980). Joel Abramson, another pioneer in bird family listing, told me that he was using the AMNH list as well. Some time in 1982, by combining the AMNH and Jim Clement's checklists, I determined that I needed only 22 more families.

In early 1983, I added plantcutters (*Phytotomidae*) and rheas (*Rheidae*) to my list on a trip to Chile. The Antarctic provided sheathbills (*Chionidae*), and northbound through New Zealand, I saw the Kiwi (*Apterygidae*). Things were going very nicely, with four new families

in the first two months of 1983.

However, later that year, logistical problems stymied me. No tour companies were geared to pursuing bird families then, and due to political problems, many borders were closed. After many difficulties, I hired an ex-patriot British tour guide to take me to the Bangwelwa swamp in Zambia to see the whale-headed stork, or shoebill. At this time, this was almost the only country in Africa where Americans could see *Balaenicipitidae*. Although the swamp was experiencing a drought, I managed to fall into

a waist-deep wet hole, and from that entrapment had my first view of a shoebill – circling overhead.

Late in November 1983, I visited the Dominican Republic to find the palm chat (*Dulidae*, according to Clements, but *Bombycillidae* according to Sibley & Monroe). By the end of 1983, I had only 16 families to go.

In March 1984, a trip to Costa Rica



Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*)

Birds from monotypic families; photos: Arnold Small Archives, LACMNH

year. Their success may have triggered Jim Clements and the late Arnold Small to try to complete their own family lists, as they expressed in their New Year's resolutions in the January, 2000, issue of *Wildbird*.

Selecting a checklist of bird families also posed a problem. There was a lack of consensus among various authors about what birds belonged in what fami-

added two new families: the wrenthrush and shrike-vireo. However, according to Clements and Sibley & Monroe, *Zelodonidae* (wrenthrush) had been placed in *Parulidae* or *Fringillidae*, and *Vireolaniidae* (shrike-vireo) in *Vireonidae*. The year ended with 11 families to go.

In March 1986, a trip to Nepal produced the ibisbill (*Ibidorhynchidae*). Then, in 1987, a trip to Australia yielded the plains-wanderer (*Pedionomidae*) and the owllet-nightjar (*Aegotheidae*). In 1988, I visited the Asa Wright Nature Center in Trinidad to see the Oilbird (*Steatornithidae*). Later that year, Yves Letocart led me to the nest of the Kagu (*Rhynochetidae*) in New Caledonia. Only six families to go!

In 1989, I returned to New Zealand to pick up two missing families, the New Zealand wren (*Acanthisittidae*) and the saddleback (*Callaeidae*). I also made a return trip to Madagascar to get the ground-roller (*Brachypteraciidae*), mesites (*Mesitornithidae*) and cuckoo-roller (*Leptosomatidae*). Fortunately, I saw the birds before learning that a big earthquake had hit California and that I needed to return there immediately.

Little did I realize that the earthquake would provide the impetus to search out the final family for my list. As I stepped into the San Francisco Airport on my return flight from Madagascar, a tremendous aftershock rocked the building. That was enough to send me scurrying off three days later to the Bolivian lowland to see my "last" family – the seriema (*Cariamidae*).

Many taxonomic changes have occurred since I believed my list complete. The family *Hypostittidae* was put into the family *Vangidae* and the family *Phytotomidae* was put into the cotingas by Clements and Monroe & Sibley (1993) (but not Roberson, 2000). The sharpbill (*Oxyruncidae*) was put into the cotingas by Monroe & Sibley. Clements and Sibley & Monroe elevated the subfamilies of the rockfowl and the hypocolius to full family status

(*Picathartidae* and *Hypocoliidae* respectively). Don Roberson and others also suggest that some new bird families may be created in the future. (See Roberson [2000] for a detailed description of the family changes.)

And so the search continues. In October 1999, I made a successful trip to Gabon, Africa to see the rockfowl (*Picathartidae*). That seemed to leave only the hypocolius to see in Bahrain – until Jim Clements told me that the Bornean bristlehead had been assigned into its own family (*Pityriidae*). I managed to see the bristlehead on April 24, 2000. The hypocolius remains to be seen, but with taxonomic changes occurring yearly, when will the quest end? ■



Kagu (*Rhynochetos jubatus*)

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Another New Target for Family Listers?

A new, monotypic family of birds has been proposed by ornithologist Jeff Groth of the American Museum of Natural History in the July 2000 issue of *The Auk* ("Molecular Evidence for the Systematic Position of *Urocynchramus pylzowi*", *Auk* 117:787-791).

This enigmatic bird of the mountains of western China, known as "Przewalski's Rosefinch" or "Pink-tailed Rosefinch", somewhat resembles a *Carpodacus* finch (such as House Finch) with a thin bill and long tail. DNA sampled by Groth from one of the few skins available suggest that *Urocynchramus* is not closely related to finches, buntings, or any other finch-like birds. Groth therefore advocates placement of this odd bird in its own family, the *Urocynchramidae* (a suggestion first made in 1918 by Domaniewski).

So, Jim . . . time to head to the mountains of western China!

Bookmark it now!

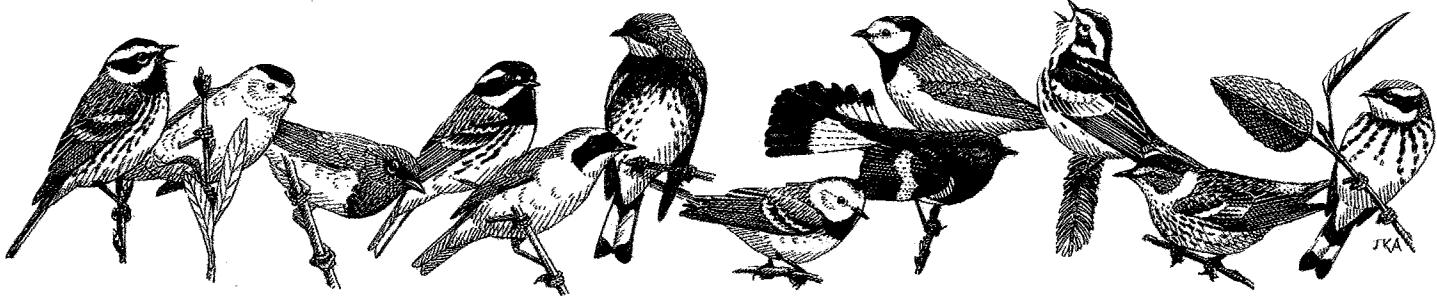
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Just imagine — an Internet site where you can shop at your favorite online store, at regular prices, while having a percentage of that price contributed to Los Angeles Audubon Society. Welcome to Shop2Give.com.

An increasing number of us are purchasing items online. Of course we hope you will buy any birding books you need at the Los Angeles Audubon Bookstore, but when you get ready to purchase other items please go to:

Shop2Give.com/LAAudubon

Many online vendors are listed there, and if you purchase through our page a percentage of your purchase (1-20%) will be sent to Los Angeles Audubon Society to help fund our programs. This is the perfect union of technology, commerce and community.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Kimball L. Garrett

The first post-Atlas summer for Los Angeles County saw, predictably, a bit of a drop in the effort devoted to monitoring breeding birds in our area, but some noteworthy records emerged nonetheless. Mary and Nick Freeman, along with Lance Benner, made frequent owlng trips into the San Gabriel Mountains and found several sites for **Northern Saw-whet Owls**, along with a few **Flammulated Owls**. This hard-working team found three recently fledged Saw-whets near Buckhorn Campground on 17 July; this enigmatic species seems to fluctuate greatly in numbers in our local mountains, and confirmed nestings are few.

For yet another summer the Bolsa Chica tern colony largely shifted operations westward to the Port of Los Angeles, with several thousand **Elegant Terns**, a couple of hundred **Caspians** and a scattering of **Royal Terns** joining the **Least Terns** to produce a bumper crop of young in June and July. The terns are nesting on new fill material upon which a busy container port will be constructed within a couple of years. An area will be set aside for nesting Least Terns, but it is unclear whether there will be any future here for the larger terns. Tern biologists Matthew Amalang and Nathan Mudry reported a probable **Sandwich Tern** in this colony on 21 and 23 June, and Charlie Collins found a one-year-old tern there on 26 June that was almost certainly a hybrid **Sandwich x Elegant Tern**. Rounding out the picture, a few **Black Skimmers** were also hanging around the Port of Los Angeles, though no breeding attempts were confirmed for this year as of the middle of July.

The flood control basins behind Hansen Dam (Lakeview Terrace) and Santa Fe Dam (Irwindale) continue to harbor some of the best riparian habitat in Los Angeles County. At least three singing **Bell's Vireos** were at each location in early July (Mike San Miguel, Kimball Garrett), and Hansen Dam also hosted several **Yellow-breasted Chats**, **Swainson's Thrushes** and **Blue Grosbeaks**, along with numerous **Yellow Warblers**; a female **Summer Tanager** was also at Hansen Dam on 1 July (Kimball Garrett). Preservation and enhancement of the important cottonwood-wil-

low habitat at both sites should be a top priority for local birders; unfortunately, Brown-headed Cowbirds are abundant at both sites, and a trapping program is urgently needed.

The most unusual late spring vagrant in Los Angeles County was a female **Hepatic Tanager** well-described by Dick Barth from DeForest Park, Long Beach, on 9 June; there are several winter records for the county, but acceptable records of spring vagrants in California are few. Dick also found a singing male **Indigo Bunting** in Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (in the Baldwin Hills) on 9 July.

There seemed to be relatively little diurnal coverage of the high mountains this summer, but Kevin Larson's trip to the San Gabriels 2-3 July yielded a **Black-and-white Warbler** near Vincent Gap, and at least 7 adult and 6 juvenile **Williamson's Sapsuckers** on the trail from Dawson Saddle to Throop Peak.

Most noteworthy from farther afield was the presence of up to three **Glossy Ibis** in agricultural fields around the south end of the Salton Sea. Michael Patten found an alternate-plumaged adult on 27 May, and Guy McCaskie found two more on 1 July. Careful searching of White-faced Ibis flocks might show this species to be regular in southeastern California, but such searches are hampered by the vast numbers of the more common species as well as the difficulty of identifying Glossy Ibis in immature and basic plumages. In the head-scratching department, an **Anhinga** at Finney Lake in late June and early July turned out to be an **Old World Darter** (*Anhinga melanogaster*); this was undoubtedly the

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
e-mail: kgarrett@nhm.org

To report birds for the tape, call:

Raymond Schep (323) 874-1318
e-mail: yoohooray@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

same individual reported as an (American) Anhinga last winter. Certainly an escapee, the presence of this species would seem to cast doubt on all but the best-documented reports of Anhinga from California. Finally, the **Black-backed ("Abeille's") Oriole** mentioned in the last *Tanager* was still present along Monument Road south of Imperial Beach as of mid-July.

The diversity of birds in southern California reaches a frenzied peak in the period from September through November, and our cumulative experience shows that just about anything is possible. Undoubtedly "vagrant-hunting" will be on the minds of many birders through the fall period, but I suggest that "vagrant-documenting" (with camera, pen, notebook and tape-recorder) should be highest on the agenda. And bear in mind, while chasing the unusual, that the fall migration of many of our "familiar" western migrants remains rather poorly understood – species like Swainson's Thrush, Nashville Warbler and Fox Sparrow come to mind. 

Earth Share: What Is It?

Earth Share of California is a Federation of 57 of the world's finest environmental and conservation organizations and charities working together. Earth Share operates much as the United Way Campaign does, collecting donations through payroll deductions and distributing the funds to member organizations. The member organizations of Earth Share, however, are all environmental and conservation oriented.

Los Angeles Audubon has been a member of this federation for over a decade. Volunteer activities include making presentations for Earth Share and LAAS at businesses, assisting at tables set up at employee fairs for participating businesses, assembling donation materials, and helping to tabulate the contributions. Training is provided.

If you can help fulfill our required volunteer hours, or have contacts at businesses that may be interested in participating, please let us know.

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Classroom kits cost \$35.00 plus \$5.95 shipping and handling. Send \$20.00 toward sponsorship of a class and our education committee will find matching funds. We are recruiting classes for the 2000-01 school year now so please send your sponsorship check as soon as possible.

Send to: Los Angeles Audubon Society
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7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
West Hollywood, CA 90046

LAAS Tours

MAKE PLANS NOW FOR 2001

Join us for the Los Angeles Audubon Society's grand Birding, Wildlife and Photography safari to Botswana and Zimbabwe, conducted by Olga Clarke and assisted by Geoff Lockwood, one of Southern Africa's most popular birding guides.

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

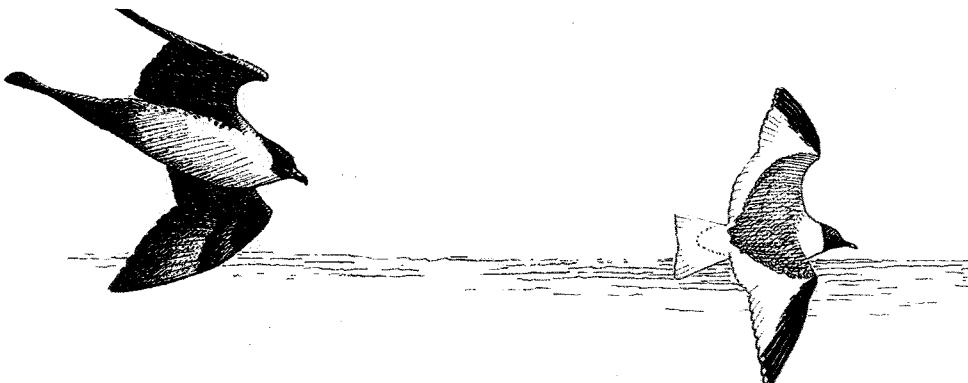
Explore this little known and magnificent land of untamed beauty. See the world's largest inland delta, the Okavango, with an incredible number of free-roaming herds of animals and the predators that follow them. Birdlife is prolific with over 550 species found in the region.

ZIMBABWE – (extension) March 8 – 17, 2001

Spend two nights in the luxurious Matetsi Game Reserve tented camp, overlooking the Zambezi River. The magnificent Victoria Falls, one of the world's greatest natural wonders will inspire you. We will visit Hwange National Park with its diverse habitats, different animal populations and over 400 species of birds. Enjoy morning and afternoon game drives in Hwange, as well as the Matusadona National Park floating chalets, located along the shores of Lake Kariba, and end up in the Mana Pools National Park, staying at Chikwenya Camp, seeing specialties like Carmine Bee-eaters and the Pel's Fishing Owl.

For more information, contact:

Olga Clarke, Travel Director
Ph/fax: (818) 249-9511
e-mail: oclarketravel@earthlink.net
www.travel@LAAudubon.org



PELAGIC TRIPS

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 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 *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 Koeppel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$30 – tea and coffee, no galley.

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.*

WESTERN TANAGER

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ASSISTANT EDITOR: Tom Frillman
CONSERVATION: Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:
Kimball Garrett
FIELD TRIPS: Mari Johnson
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(323) 876-7609 – fax
(323) 874-1318 – bird tape
laas@LAAudubon.org
www.LAAudubon.org
westerntanager@LAAudubon.org

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FIELD TRIPS

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

Sunday, September 3 –

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.

Monday, September 4 –

Malibu Lagoon. **Robert Weissler** will lead us through the lagoon in search of Elegant Tern, Snowy Plover and migrating shorebirds and gulls. Meet at 8:00 A.M. by the kiosk by the Malibu Lagoon lot. Take PCH northwest over the bridge, turn right and park on Cross Creek Rd.

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.

Sunday, September 10 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader: **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. to view colorful resident and migrating birds, including the introduced 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 west (right) and turn left into the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave.
\$2 donation to Whittier Narrows.

Saturday, September 16 –

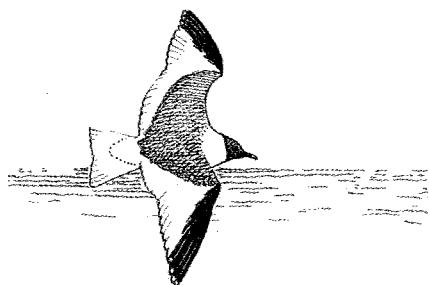
Oxnard Plain. **Irwin Woldman** will lead us throughout the plain looking for migrants and vagrants. From the 101 W, take Las Posas Rd. S to Laguna Rd. Turn W to Wood Rd. and meet at the corner of Wood Rd. and Laguna at 7:30 A.M. 'Scopes helpful.

Sunday, September 17 –

Ballona Wetlands. **Bob Shanman** will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland. 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, September 24 –

Sycamore Canyon and Point Mugu. **Raymond Schep** will lead us through this beautiful canyon in search of chaparral birds, migrants and vagrants. A Sedge Wren was here three years ago, so anything is possible. Then on to Mugu Point and various shore and water birds. Take PCH N to Sycamore Canyon (at the Ventura Co. line) and meet in the parking lot at 8:00 A.M. \$5 parking fee.



Saturday, September 30 –

Mojave Vicinity. Leaders **Nick** and **Mary Freeman**. We will carpool to Galileo Hills in search of migrants and resident birds, then return to California City Central Park for birds and lunch. We may bird Butterbreyt Springs, time and conditions permitting. Come prepared for a possible hot, dusty, fun day. We will meet at 8:00 A.M. Allot about two hours driving time from LA. Call LAAS to register. Limited to 14 participants.

Sunday, October 1 –

Topanga State Park. Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 3 for write-up.

Sunday, October 8 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 10 for write-up.

Sunday, October 15 –

Ballona Wetlands. Leader **Bob Shanman**. Meet at 8:00 A.M. See September 17 write-up for details.

Saturday, October 28 –

San Gabriel Mountains. Leader **Karen Johnson**. Enjoy the changing of the seasons and crispness in the air during this autumn visit to the Angeles National Forest. Mountain Quail, White-headed Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, sapsuckers, Mountain Chickadee, nuthatches, Purple and Cassin's finches and other montane species will be sought at Charlton Flat, Chilao and Buckhorn campgrounds. Meet to carpool at 8:00 A.M. on Hwy 2 in La Cañada, just north of the 210 Fwy. Wear layered clothing; bring lunch. Drivers will need to display a National Forest Adventure Pass.

Sunday, October 29 –

Arcadia Wilderness Park. Join those who participated in LA County Breeding Bird Atlas for our final get together to party, picnic and reminisce about all the wonderful birds we atlased.

EVENING MEETINGS

NEW MEETING PLACE

The Los Angeles River Center and Gardens
570 W. Avenue 26
Los Angeles, CA 90065

Our new location is just off the 110 Freeway on Avenue 26. It is very accessible with lots of free parking. (This was formerly Lawry's California Center Restaurant.)

7:00 P.M. – Refreshments begin
7:30 P.M. – Program

Meeting Raffle . . . Many of you have enjoyed the raffle prizes at the monthly meetings. To increase your chances of winning, visit the LAAS Bookstore and Headquarters either on meeting day or the Saturday immediately preceding the monthly meeting and receive an extra raffle ticket to submit at the meeting. Good luck!

Tuesday, September 12, 2000 Sylvia Gallagher

"The Deserts of North America"

For many people the word desert produces an image of desolate, barren sand or glorious carpets of spring wildflowers among towering green saguaros. Both images are correct, but they are far from the whole picture. At this month's general meeting, Sylvia Gallagher will take you on a slide tour of *The Deserts of North America*. She will address such questions as: Why are the deserts located where they are? How many deserts are there, and how do they differ from one another? What are some of the birds typical of each desert and how are they adapted to life in their severe environment? Her talk will be illustrated with slides from the Sea & Sage Audubon library of nature slides.

Tuesday, October 10, 2000 Olga Clarke

"Botswana and Zimbabwe"

Los Angeles Audubon Society Tour Director, Olga Clarke, is a well-known birder and tour guide. She has led natural history tours to many parts of the world, including about 15 tours to various parts of Africa. Olga will present highlights of her recent trips to Botswana and Zimbabwe. This slide presentation features birds and animals viewed in prime wildlife habitat. Don't miss this interesting and entertaining program.

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