

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

Understanding Bird Language

by Nicholas E. Collias



After learning a bird's name and how to recognize the species, the next step to increase our appreciation and enjoyment of birds is to understand the living bird in its behavior and

social life as an individual. One of the best ways to do this is to study the language of the species. Birds use many vocal signals, often

in conjunction with special visual displays, to help them meet the various problems in their lives.

The repertoire of vocal signals or "vocabulary" of a bird species has often been underestimated. In

Song Sparrow

Photos by Brian Small

her classic book (1943) on the Song Sparrow, Mrs. Margaret Nice listed some 21 chief vocalizations for this species. After years observing the behavior of the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) of Asia, ancestor of domestic chickens, and years observing the African Village Weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*) of sub-Saharan Africa, I felt that I could recognize some two dozen different vocal signals for each of these two species.

Basic Vocalizations of Young Birds

In former times, when America was largely a rural country, many families kept chickens. Baby chicks have two principal types of vocalizations. When lost, cold or hungry, a chick gives loud distress cries (peeps or chirps). When the distress is relieved, the chick promptly switches to very different and soft pleasure notes (twitters). When a mother hen hears the distress cries of a chick, she clucks, goes to it and leads it back to the rest of the brood. She broods it if it is cold, and may call it to food if it is hungry. The company of other chicks also quickly relieves the distress of a lost chick.

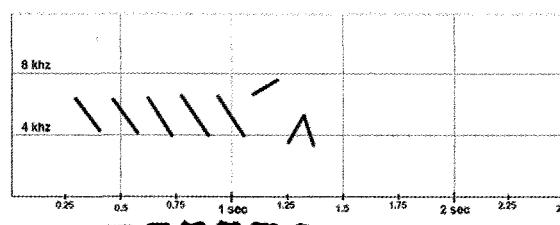
Clucking sounds alone can attract chicks. The significant elements in clucking, as analyzed by playbacks of artificial sounds to an isolated chick, are duration and pitch. The shorter the note or the lower the pitch, the more the notes attract the chick. In these experiments the response of the chick was measured by how often distress cries or pleasure notes were given by the chick to the sound.

Different calls of birds are similarly composed of basic elements that vary in duration, frequency or pitch, loudness, and tonality or harshness of notes. These different elements can each be arranged in pairs of opposite extremes, in effect a code. In general, in calls that we assume to be pleasant or non-threatening, the component notes are brief, of low frequency and amplitude and not harsh. Unpleasant calls tend to be opposite in these respects to our ears as well as in their physical structure.

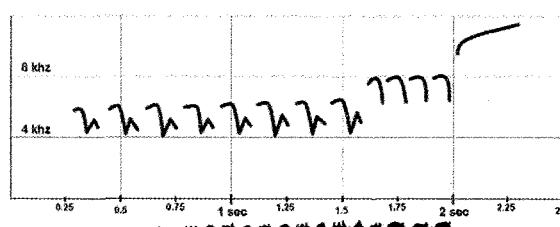
In 1945, the Bell Telephone Company announced the invention of the sound spectrograph, a machine that produces visual pictures of sounds. This machine has revolutionized the study of vocal communication in animals. A typical

sound spectrogram or sonogram displays sounds as dark marks on a graph with time on the horizontal axis and frequency on the vertical axis. A sonogram of a chick's distress cry shows a drop in frequency from the beginning to the end of each note (chirp), a sonogram of a pleasure note shows the opposite, a rise in frequency from the start to the end of each note (twitter). This contrast is an example of Charles Darwin's principle of antithesis which states that in opposite states of mind, an animal (or person) tends to show opposite or antithetical motor patterns.

American Redstart



Blackburnian Warbler



Simplified Sonograms by Don Crockett from www.A2Z4Birders.com - Online Guide: North American Birds

Here we apply this principle to vocalizations. The principle of antithesis functions to reduce ambiguity in vocal signals, and helps solve the problem of intergradation between signals. For example, calls given by a chick in intermediate stimulus situations, such as mild disturbance, have a loop-like or chevron pattern to the note. One can classify vocal signals by grouping them into more or less antithetical pairs. Intergradation of different signals reflects mixed motivation.

In practice different vocal signals are often self-evident. Discrete calls can often be recognized by the stimulus situation in which they are given, including food or hunger, temperature changes, alarm to enemies, reproductive behavior situations, and flocking situations.

Food and Hunger Calls

A young American Robin that I took from the nest soon after it hatched and raised myself could express different degrees of hunger. After I fed it a worm or two it would be quiet, then as it became progressively more hungry it began to give light peeps, followed after some minutes by much louder single notes, and finally by loud notes in pairs. Just before it was fed the young bird would give high, strident, insistent and rapidly-repeated notes. The more worms I fed it the longer it would remain quiet and often sleep.

When a mother robin comes to her nest with food, she gives a soft mellow note. By imitating this call, I could readily stimulate my young robin to promptly gape for food.

Loud begging calls might attract predators, but are especially uttered in the presence of the parent. By hiding under my desk, I found that my hungry young robin would soon fall silent when it could not see me.

Alarm Cries

Young birds promptly become silent when they hear alarm cries of adult birds, as we have often observed in nestling Village Weavers which are raised in enclosed nests.

Besides being silent, the safest thing a young bird can do in presence of an enemy is to hide and become immobile. As I approached a downy young Killdeer on an open, pebble-covered beach, it crouched and froze in response to the alarm cries of the parent birds. I could even gently pick it up and replace it on the ground without breaking its trance-like immobility while its parents shrieked in the air above us.

Parent birds can express different degrees of alarm as an enemy gets closer. When one draws near to the nest of a Gray Catbird, the alarm cries of the parents change abruptly from relatively short notes to prolonged and catlike meows. As an example from a very different bird, a female Northern Harrier, gave shrill, segmented alarm calls whenever we began walking toward her nest

on the ground, but when we got close to her nest and nestlings, she began high, drawn-out screams while diving down at us from the air. Some parent birds give alarm cries at an increased rate as the danger becomes greater, as I noticed on coming nearer to the fledged young of a pair of Indigo Buntings. When captured and seized, a bird will often give loud, harsh distress screams, as every bird-bander knows.

Some parent birds give an "all-clear" call when the danger is past as in the purring of a pair of Sandhill Cranes at their nest, in contrast to the harsh-grating alarm cry, as described by L.H. Walkinshaw. At the all-clear sign, the young would promptly return to the nest from the surrounding marsh into which they had rushed to hide at the alarm.

Some birds can specify the type of enemy by their calls. Red Junglefowl cackle at the sudden approach of a ground predator such as a dog or person and they may fly up into the safety of the trees. But when a hawk flies in to attack, the cocks give a loud scream that instantly causes chicks to run a short distance and then freeze into a silent immobility.

Reproductive Behavior

Male birds as different as Red Junglefowl and Village Weavers may give a harsh, low-pitched growl when threatening or chasing a rival male. Threat sounds differ from alarm cries which often are also harsh calls in lacking the higher frequencies seen in alarm cries.

In a species with communal display by the males (Greater Prairie Chicken), the males announce the arrival of visiting females with a special call. Fran and Fred Hamerstrom studied this species for many years at Plainfield, Wisconsin, and we were privileged to sit in their blinds to watch these fascinating birds display. In the dim light of early dawn, we could always tell when the females had arrived because the males would suddenly begin giving loud "whoop!" calls.

Bird songs serve to identify the species, the sex, and even the individual. There are many examples of cryptic species such as *Empidonax* flycatchers that are almost identical in appearance to another species but, with very different songs. Robert Stein of Cornell University demonstrated that Traill's Flycatcher

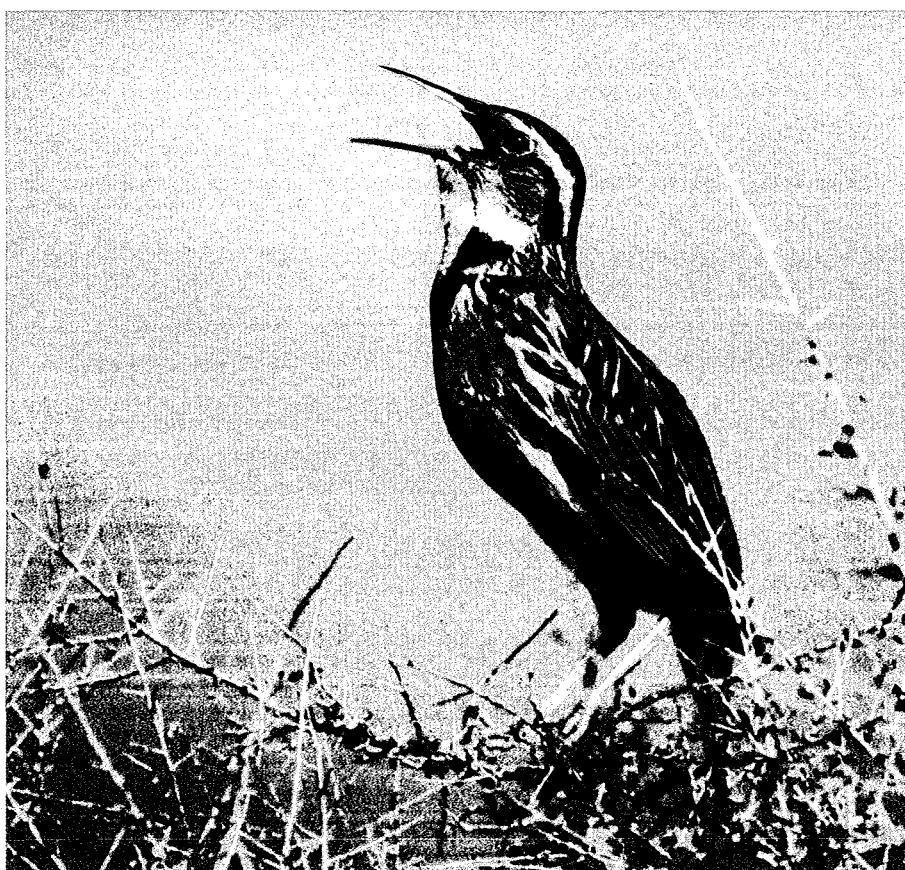
consisted of two different species, virtually indistinguishable visually, now named the Alder Flycatcher and the Willow Flycatcher, which apparently do not hybridize. Males would threaten or attack a painted *Empidonax* paper mâché model placed in their territory when their own species' song was played, but not with the other species' song.

Some songbirds, such as many wood warblers, have two main types of song, one for territorial defense, the other used to attract a mate. It has been shown for Song Sparrows and Northern Mockingbirds that individuals with more varied songs tend to be more successful in attracting females. In 1973, in a world survey of bird song, Charles Hartshorne, a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, suggested that the varied songs of different species were a result of an "anti-monotony principle" in female preference for males. Mrs. Nice, in her study of the Song Sparrow, by counting numbers of songs given, was the first to show that once a male songbird obtains a mate, the frequency of his singing drastically declines, by 90% in the case of her

Song Sparrows.

Song is sexually stimulating. In female Song Sparrows treated with the sex hormone estradiol, William Searcy and Peter Marler found that playback of the male's song would induce an isolated female to give the solicitation display for copulation. The song of the male canary has been found to stimulate egg laying by the female.

The male Village Weaver has a whole range of special vocalizations related to its complex nesting and mating behavior. The male has a prolonged song of advertisement that may also incorporate a number of call notes of the species. Many males nest in the same colony tree. Each male builds his nests on one or a few branches of his small territory which he rigorously defends from other males. When an unmated female arrives, all the males hang from the entrance to their most recently built nest, and in a spectacular communal display each male invites the female to enter his nest, flapping his wings and uttering individually distinctive courtship notes. If a female enters a male's nest he flies wildly about the nest



Western Meadowlark

while uttering a call of high excitement or gives a purring vocalization, and judging from the situation, both are calls of apparent "elation," the opposite of distress. The male then goes to the nest entrance and sings directly to the female within. While the female inspects the interior of the nest, the male perches nearby in his small territory and keeps up a continual hard chatter, possibly a warning to neighboring males not to interfere. If the female decides to accept the nest, on emerging from it she perches in his territory, the male flies to her and mounts and the birds may copulate at once, and simultaneously a whirring sound is heard from the male or from both birds.

Nest site selection is an important part of courtship in many birds. Klaus Immelmann found that the male Zebra Finch in Australia uses a special call to attract a female to a number of potential nest sites for her selection.

In some species, like the American Goldfinch, the male feeds the female on her nest. A good many years ago, at Cornell University where I was a post-doctoral fellow, Professor Arthur A. Allen had set up a blind for photography at a goldfinch nest, and he kindly permitted me to occupy the blind when he was not using it. There were several other goldfinches nesting in the vicinity and flying back and forth, but I soon noticed that the female on her nest began giving loud food-begging calls only when her own mate called as he was coming to feed her and often well before he appeared, and she ignored the voice of all other males. Individual recognition of the voice of the mate is now known for other birds.

After young birds fledge, the parent may lead them about with a special call. At the Delta Waterfowl Research Station at the south end of Lake Manitoba in Canada, many ducklings from eggs collected in the wild were hatched in a large incubator and made available to investigators. We could easily attract young Redhead or Canvasback ducklings on the day they hatched by imitating the parental call notes. If visual stimuli were added by the observer walking slowly away from the ducklings while also calling, the duckling's response of following was definitely enhanced.

Flocking Behavior

Hubert and Mabel Frings tape-recorded the assembly call of American Crows sighting an owl, and later when they played this call over a loud speaker crows would come to the source of the sounds within minutes.

Canada Geese on the ground assemble as they give low grunting sounds, but then switch to a loud honking as they began to run for flock take-off and they continue honking while in the air, no doubt helping to keep the flock together.

A number of birds have take-off and landing calls. A flock of American Goldfinches calls *per-chick-oree* during take-off and while flying along, but switch to a very different series of notes when they land. Lawrence's Goldfinch and the Lesser Goldfinch often flock together in the winter months, but the flock contact note of the former species is much higher pitched than in the latter species helping them to keep with their own kind. This difference was described by Ellen Coutlee (Mrs. Robert Jennrich) of UCLA who made one of the first comparative and spectrographic studies of the entire vocal repertoire of two species of birds. Courtship calls were also different, but threat, alarm, and distress cries of the two species were very similar.

Some Generalizations

1) Vocalizations are social signals that help birds meet various problems of their lives such as hunger, enemies, competitors, reproduction, and flocking.

2) There is a code of communication in that calls are composed of basic elements of duration, pitch, loudness, and tonality or harshness.

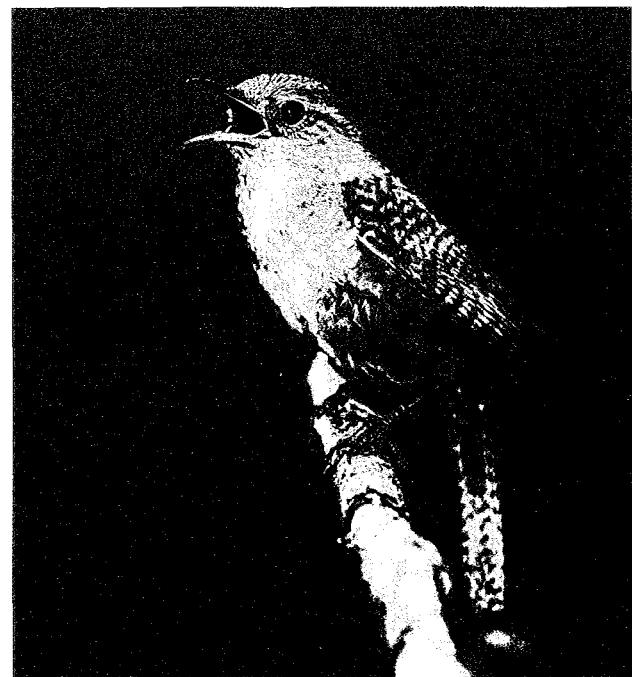
3) Vocal signals reflect underlying motivation, and the arrangement of vocal signals and their component elements in antithetical pairs helps reduce ambiguity of signals.

4) The different elements of a call may combine to enhance the response. For example, the normal flock contact

notes given by many birds are brief, low-pitched, soft, and not harsh. All four elements probably summate to attract conspecifics.

5) The meaning of a call is often evident from the situation in which it is given. The specific response to a vocal signal can vary with context. Thus, the honking of Canada Geese serves for territorial defense on the ground, helps bring separated mates together, can signal alarm, and helps maintain flock cohesion in the air.

6) The principle of adaptive specialization helps account for the variety of the language of different species. For example, songbirds, by far the most numerous species of birds, have evolved a correspondingly great variety of songs, enabling members of the same species to recognize each other. 



House Wren

Nicholas Collias is a retired professor of zoology at UCLA where he taught and directed research in animal behavior. With Martin Joos, he was author in 1953 of the first spectrographic study of the general repertoire of vocal signals of a bird. He has been a member of the Los Angeles Audubon Society for 40 years.

"IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS" NOW AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT ONLINE

With the help of dozens of experts throughout the state, Audubon-California has completed a list of nearly 300 potential Important Bird Areas ("IBAs"), representative of the wealth of bird diversity in the state. California's IBA program, modeled after similar efforts in other states (and in countries around the world), seeks to guide future bird conservation activities by drawing attention to critical habitats and regions for birds, using criteria such as concentrations of sensitive species, large numbers of particular groups of birds (e.g. shorebirds), and the presence of rare and unique bird habitats. A list of preliminary IBAs for the state has been posted on Audubon-California's website for comment. If you have additions or suggestions, we hope to hear from you soon, as

we are eager to finalize the list and to begin preparing accounts of each site for publication.

To view the list, go to: Audubon-ca.org
Once in the website, click on "Conservation" (left side, 4th item under "Web Pages"), then on "IBA Program" (top, far right).

For a hard copy of the preliminary IBAs, contact:
Daniel S. Cooper
Biologist, Audubon-California
The Audubon Center
6042 Monte Vista St.
Los Angeles, CA 90042
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CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Well, how do you like the new order in America? As we write (mid-February) we have a president's cabinet loaded for bear – many bears named The Environment, Women's Rights, Public Education, Conservation, Human Services, and more.

Let's just talk about Gale A. Norton, our brand new Secretary of the Interior. A self-confessed nature-lover, she has described a "spiritual experience" on viewing the majesty of the snow-covered Rockies. At Denver University and Law School she fell under the influence of the Libertarian philosophy of Ayn Rand with its emphasis on the priority of private rights over government. With her law degree she joined the Mountain States Legal Foundation of James Watt which strongly opposed the federal government's land policies. Norton fit snugly in this atmosphere and when Reagan chose Watt as Interior Secretary she joined him there. Watt was a religious fanatic, a darling of the Radical Right, and was an

embarrassment for many of his own party. A few pertinent quotations: Environmentalists are "political activists, a left-wing cult which seeks to bring down the type of government I believe in." The National Audubon Society "...wants a government that believes in centralized socialist planning." "My responsibility is to follow the Scriptures which call upon us to occupy the land until Jesus comes."

Watt left Interior after he insulted a few minorities and blew a fuse over the Beach Boys playing on government property. Norton remained there under his successor and eventually returned to the private sector. She was elected Attorney General of Colorado in 1990. Reluctant to pursue big polluters she preferred a "self-audit" law that allowed corporations to get off scot-free if they admitted to violations before they were caught. Trouble was that not many companies bothered to report their sins and very few were ever penalized. She ran for the Senate in 1996, lost and went back to private practice.

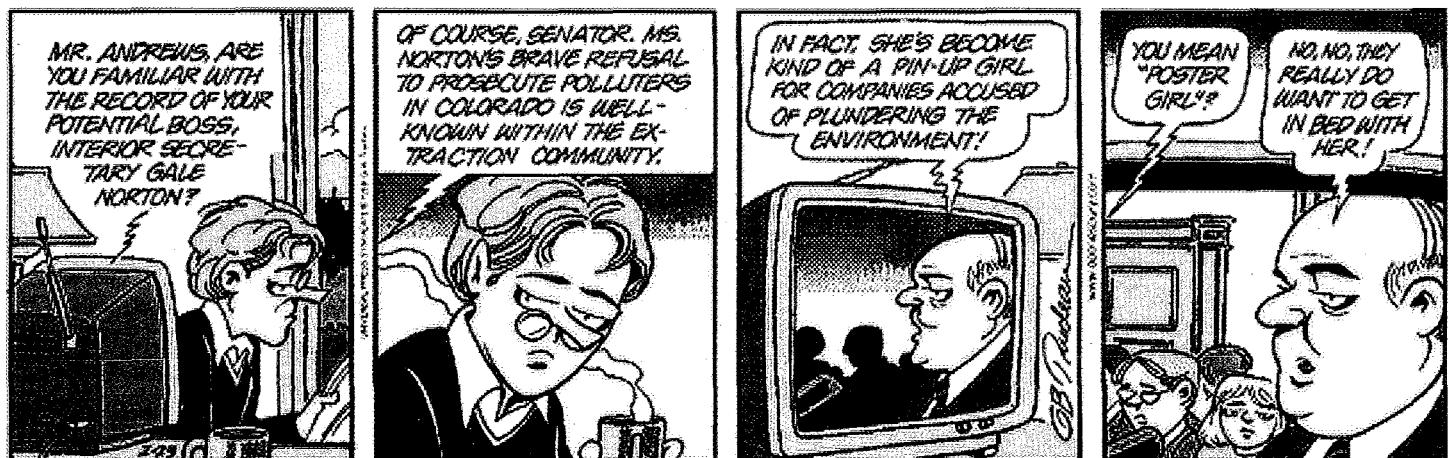
Norton organized the Council of Republicans for Environmental Advocacy to give a more progressive color to the party's anti-environmental image. Her steering committee was liberally sprinkled with lobbyists for the auto, oil, and mining interests. She hosted a Council dinner in 1998 where the most prominent sponsors were the National Mining Association, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, the National Coal Council, and the American Forest Paper Association. With friends like these, one may be too chummy with them to remember one's "spiritual experiences".

Ever the enthusiast, Norton serves on the board of the Defenders of Property Rights, a legal group that represents landowners who challenge environmental regulations.

Long before George W. Bush dashed through the states in pursuit of the presidency, advocating oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Gale Norton beat him to the punch in the mid-1980s.

DOONSURY By Garry Trudeau

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The Senate approved her as Secretary of the Interior with a 75-24 vote, but the negative votes were close to the highest ever registered against an approved Cabinet nominee.

Though Norton is no James Watt, her intelligence and political acumen may protect her from the outrage that he generated.

What we have now in Washington is an administration that calls vigorously for an amiable, bipartisan, moderate government yet presents us with a Cabinet that satisfies the yearnings of its formidable right wing. Gale Norton does not offer much hope for those of us who value the forests, the wetlands, the fertile plains, and all the wildlife they harbor. Her entire public life has been dedicated to the dominance of her sacred property rights over government's attempt to preserve our natural heritage.

On February 20th, in her first press interview as Secretary, she said, "When you talk about property rights, it's important that our environmental laws are applied in a way that works closely with landowners. Our farmers and ranchers are often the best stewards of wild places." The interviewer paraphrased her words: Clinton was too hasty nominating 20 new national monuments, Interior and Congress could work with local officials, property owners and business executives to address their concerns – such as allowing existing mining operations to continue in the monuments. (Los Angeles Times, Feb 21). Interesting. This is PUBLIC land owned by all of us. What kind of mentality accepts the right of business executives and property owners to profit by exploiting our land? The action by the Administration may be cautious in handling the national monuments for now, but we can plainly see that its goals are not shared by the majority that did not vote for it.

Norton speaks of stewards. The Secretary of the Interior must be the Grand Steward of our national treasures, not the Grand Destroyer. The next four years are going to be tough. Those of us who love open space, clean air and water, wilderness, and wildlife will have to hang in there and fight. When the time arrives, let's go! 

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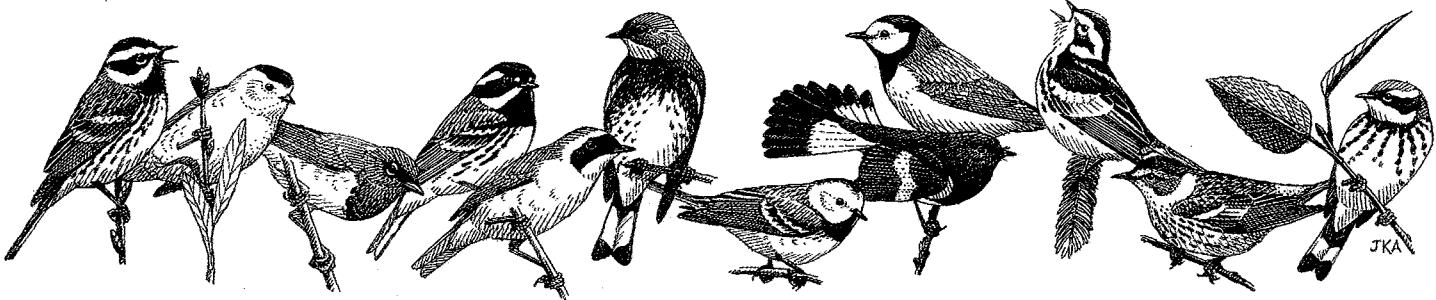
Shelly Backlar

Mono Lake Committee Development Director

(818) 716-8488

shelly@monolake.org

www.monolake.org/events/index.html



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Daniel S. Cooper

The late-January to March stretch is a lean time for birders in California. The late push of fall migration that continues into December is long gone, and we've chased and seen many of the interesting staked-out birds turned up by Christmas Bird Counts. But, as the days grow longer and afternoons are warmer through February, the leaves on our native willows and walnuts appear in the streams and hillsides, and each day reminds us that spring is right around the corner.

Some of the expected rarities wintering this season included up to three **Long-tailed Ducks** (formerly "Old-squaw") between Dockweiler State Beach and Playa del Rey (Richard Barth, Bruce Broadbooks), a female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Bonelli Park in San Dimas (Michael San Miguel, Jr.), two **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** in West Los Angeles (RB), an Eastern Phoebe at Hansen Dam (RB) a **Black-and-white Warbler** in West Los Angeles (RB), a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** along the Los Angeles River at Los Feliz Blvd. (RB), a **Palm Warbler** at Peck Rd. Water Conservation Park, El Monte (m. ob.) and an immature **Baltimore Oriole** at the Los Angeles National Cemetery in Westwood (RB).

This season saw two **Gray Flycatchers**, one reported from Sycamore Canyon in the Whittier Hills (Matthew Schmahl) and the other nearby at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center (Yvonne Tsai). Although it is the expected flycatcher in the genus *Empidonax* in winter, they were formerly more common in winter on the coast of southern California, but nowadays generally just a handful winter, mainly in lowland riparian areas and in lightly-used city parks

with extensive lawns. Interestingly they seem to have expanded their Great Basin breeding range in California beginning in the 1970s, with nesting recently documented in the northeastern San Gabriel Mountains.

Also interesting were **Mew Gulls** inland during January at Reseda Park in the San Fernando Valley (Steve Sosen-sky) and at Bonelli Park (MSM, Jr.), and

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.

Send observations with details to:

Birds of the Season

Daniel S. Cooper
The Audubon Center
6042 Monte Vista St.
Los Angeles, CA 90042
Phone: (323) 254-0252
Email: dcooper1@pacbell.net

North American Birds, Los Angeles County

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

California Bird Records Committee

Guy McCaskie
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several birds nearer to the coast at Harbor Park, Wilmington and the lower Los Angeles River at Willow St., Long Beach (both Dan Cooper). This bird wanders inland more frequently in northern California, but here near the southern edge of its range, it is a decidedly uncommon, largely coastal species.

Other species considered rarities a few years ago but now appearing to be wintering regularly in small numbers in the Los Angeles Basin include Eurasian Wigeon, Ross' and Snow geese, both Glaucous-winged and Thayer's gulls, Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager, and most of the California warblers. Of this latter group, all but MacGillivray's Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat winter regularly in our area. Yellow-rumped Warbler (both "Audubon's" and "Myrtle" subspecies) and Common Yellowthroat winter in large numbers throughout the Basin, and Townsend's and Orange-crowned are both fairly common, particularly in urban areas. Nashville, Yellow, Black-throated Gray, and Wilson's warblers are scarce but still noted in small numbers, particularly in riparian areas such as soft-bottomed stretches of river channels.

Most surprising was a **Burrowing Owl** that was observed along the Rio Hondo at Peck Rd. Water Conservation Park in El Monte at the end of January (Arlis Dowd). It was reportedly using a drainpipe as a roost, a behavior typical of urban-dwelling Burrowing Owls in California, while their rural counterparts tend to use ground-squirrel burrows, particularly along unlined (by concrete) irrigation ditches and flood-control channels. Burrowing Owls were formerly a very common sight in southern California, particularly in the flatlands of the

Los Angeles Basin. Few observers seem to realize how rare this bird is along the coast today, where the only remnant breeding colonies are at Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station at North Island, San Diego, and only scattered individuals are encountered in fall and winter. A few more pairs are scattered through western Riverside County and in the Antelope Valley. Like Western Meadowlark, Loggerhead Shrike, and Black-tailed Jackrabbit, the owls' presence harks back to a long-gone, pre-war Los Angeles of bean fields, dairy farms, and catching "horny toads" in the local wash. This provides one of only a handful of San Gabriel Valley records in recent years. Let's hope it won't be the last.

By the time you read this, in early May, spring migration will be at its peak, and each birding outing will bring an overwhelming array of colorful migrants on their way north. So, as this is the May-June issue of the *Western Tanager*, allow me to predict a few events, and give some suggestions for late-spring birding in southern California.

I mentally divide my birding plans this time of year in two parts – breeding-bird-finding and vagrant-chasing. I will discuss the former, the noble pursuit of expanding our knowledge about the distribution of species, in the next issue of the *Tanager*. Discussed here will be the latter, the time-honored tradition of California birders' scouring desert oases for wayward (or "vagrant") birds in the searing heat of late May and June. Dots on maps such as Oasis (Mono Co.), Furnace Creek Ranch (Inyo), California City (Kern) and Morongo Valley (San Bernardino) have long been favorites of birders in spring, whose reports gush with reports of Eastern songbirds (and the occasional . . . other . . .) glimpsed at rest stops and golf courses you've never heard of. Of course, each time you go out to look, it seems to be a week too late or early.

Fortunately, it's not too late. From mid-May to mid-June, you're going to be spending your weekends in the field. It's vagrant season. Cancel appointments. Postpone other obligations. It's really not too much to ask – a few days out of the year is all.

For successful vagrant-hunting, tim-

ing isn't everything, and neither is location. It's repetition. No, I don't like spending all my weekends wandering around in back of coffeeshops and Motels 6 in the Mojave Desert day after day anymore than you. I am sick of explaining to curious locals that I'm not taking pictures of their houses, and am convinced that value meals are really not that much of a value.

But friends, it might be worth it. Time to dredge out that tired birding saw: "rare birds are 'rare' for reason" – to find a Kentucky Warbler in California, you've got to go birding day after day, week after week, at the proper season, in the proper habitat. Simple as that. Plan on staying overnight, or even over two nights if possible. Check sites in the morning and again in the late afternoon, as birds move through the desert during the heat of the day. Late spring migration is generally erratic in the number and diversity of birds moving through – including (especially?) in that magical early June period when there may be days of "stalled" movement and then, one morning, a push of new, unexpected birds.

In general, local birders simply are not out enough in spring to find rarities. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, plan their spring birding with a trip to Morongo Valley in the third week in April, along with maybe a Memorial Day jaunt to Death Valley or eastern Kern County. They see a few things at Morongo – mostly what they saw there last April – and maybe one or two "low-end" vagrants over the Memorial Day weekend, a couple American Redstarts and maybe a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Then, summer hits and they wonder where their spring migration went!

Following repetition – repeat visits to historically productive areas – there's timing. Vagrant season doesn't really get going in southern California until the second week in May, but it lasts well into June. On the Channel Islands, it may even peak at the *end* of June! This is not to say that migration in southern California starts in May. On the contrary, by the end of March, a visit through oak-sycamore woodlands in the foothills or out to mesquite thickets in the desert can yield hundreds, sometimes thousands of

migrants funneling north.

The vagrants however, tend to lag behind this main push. As the spring wears on, and the regular Western migrants are already on breeding territories (late-May), the stragglers get much easier to find at "vagrant traps" – typically isolated patches of vegetation and water within homogeneous landscapes (islands, desert, coastlines, etc.). Searching for a Prairie or a Blue-winged warbler amongst 200 Yellow Warblers flitting among the tops of pines at California City in early May can be maddening, and your time might be better in the same park spent a month later.

Aside from the largest sites such as Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley, no vagrant trap is clearly superior to another in terms of the rarities they support. There's really nothing about Desert Center that makes it any better than Blythe – it's just that the latter is outside the comfortable one-day birding distance for a handful of crack birders who tend to check it daily in May-June and again in September-October.

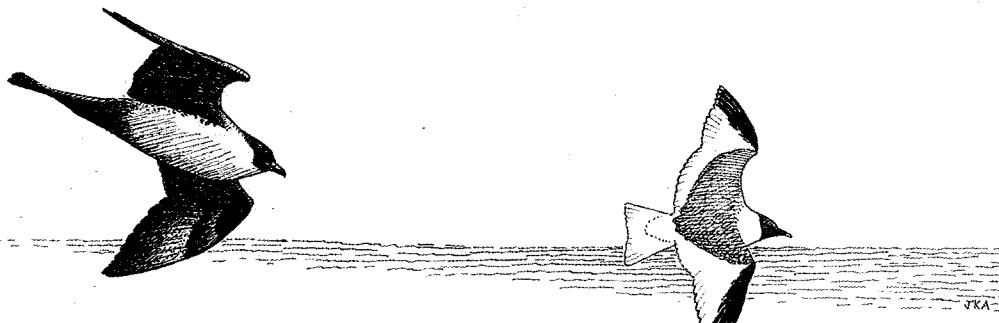
Finally, bird smart. Look carefully at each species that looks even the slightest bit out of place. Of course, this means you have to learn your bird distribution pretty well. A black-headed gull in the Mojave Desert in May is about as likely to be Franklin's as a Bonaparte's, and probably not a Laughing, which occurs commonly at the Salton Sea but tends to stay there. Any ground-dove in the Mojave Desert is big news, and Ruddy Ground-Dove may be as (un-) expected as Common. These trends and exceptions, learned from both field experience and from studying books, will in general make you a better birder. ■

New on the Web

Birders' Telegraph: a link from the *Especially for Birders* page on the LAAS website.

Discuss southern California rare bird information here. Emphasis on the "rare bird" please.

<http://laaudubon.org/telegraph/birdtel.html>



PELAGIC TRIPS

Sunday, May 6 –

Marina del Rey and out to sea.

Twelve-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 6:00 A.M. on the R/V UCLA Seaworld. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar, Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine Jaeger; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to 5); Common Murre; Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Leaders: Barney Schlinger and Michael J. San Miguel. \$50, no galley.

Saturday, June 9 –

Santa Cruz Island, landing at Prisoner's Cove.

Ten-hour trip departs from Island Packers dock in Ventura at 8:00 A.M. on the M/V Jeffrey Arvid. The endemic Island Scrub-Jay is easily seen here. We will then cruise off the island for pelagic species. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine Jaeger; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to 5); Common Murre; Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus's Murrelet. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel. \$60, no galley.

Saturday, August 18 –

San Nicolas Island toward Cherry banks – a deep water trip.

Twenty-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 4:00 A.M. on the R/V Yellowfin. You may want to bring a waterproof sleeping bag. Birds seen on prior trips: Red-billed Tropicbird, Leach's Storm-Petrel, Long-tailed Jaeger, South Polar Skua. Blue Whales are often seen on this trip. Leaders: Kimball Garrett, Mitch Heindel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$135 (price includes 3 meals).

Saturday, September 8 –

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

Twelve-hour trip departs from the Ventura Marina at 7:00 A.M. on the M/V Jeffrey Arvid. 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 5); Common Murre; Craveri's and Xantus's murrelets; Cassin's Auklet. Rarities: Buller's Shearwater; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger. Blue, Finback, and Humpback whales have been seen on this trip. Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$70 – galley on board.

Saturday, October 13 –

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

Twelve-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 6:30 A.M. on the R/V Yellowfin. 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 5); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: Red-billed Tropicbird; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger; boobies (three in the past). Leaders: Mitch Heindel and Michael J. San Miguel. \$50 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Sunday, October 21 –

San Pedro Channel and out to sea toward Santa Barbara Island. (Final destination to be determined by the leaders).

Twelve-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 (up to 5); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets; Xantus's Murrelet. Leaders: Michael J. San Miguel and other.

\$45 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, November 17 –

San Pedro Channel along the coastal escarpment.

Eight-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 (up to 5); Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Common Murre; Xantus's Murrelet; Flesh-footed and Buller's shearwaters. Leaders: Kimball Garrett and Mitch Heindel.

\$35 – 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 reserve early.

WESTERN TANAGER

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CONSERVATION: Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:
Kimball Garrett
FIELD TRIPS: Mari Johnson
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FIELD TRIPS

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Saturday, May 19 – Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area in Baldwin Hills.

Leader to be announced.

Trips covering landscaped parklands and
natural coastal scrub habitats are designed
for beginning birders and members of
the community. The park entrance is off
La Cienega Blvd. between Rodeo Rd.
and Stocker St. After passing the
entrance kiosk (\$3 parking fee), turn left
(leading to the "Olympic Forest") and
park in the first available spaces.

Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, May 20 – Ballona Wetlands.

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

Sunday, June 3 – Topanga State Park.
Leader **Gerry Haigh**. Meet at 8:00 A.M.
See May 6 write-up.

Sunday, June 10 – Whittier Narrows.
Leader **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:00 A.M.
See May 13 write-up.

LAAS Tours

Join us for the L.A. Audubon sponsored
tours to Australia Sept. 9-26,
2001 and/or New Zealand Sept. 26-
Oct 13, 2001. Andy Anderson, top
Aussie birder/guide, and Olga
Clarke, LAAS Travel Director, will
jointly lead these birding, natural
history, and photography tours. For
more information, contact:

Olga Clarke, Travel Director
2027 El Arbolita Drive,
Glendale, CA 91208
Ph/fax: (818) 249-9511
e-mail:
oclarke@earthlink.net
www.LAAudubon.org

Friday – Monday, June 22-25

Southern Sierras Weekend with Bob Barnes. Goshawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo,
Pileated Woodpecker, and owls possible.
140-150 species seen each year. Participation
limited. For information flyer,
reserve with SASE. Fee: \$15 per day
attended (\$60 for 4 days). Reserve early.

Saturday, June 16 –

**Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area
in Baldwin Hills.**

See **May 19** write-up.

Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, June 30 – Mt. Pinos Area.

Leader **Ray Schep**. Calliope Hummingbird,
woodpeckers, Hermit Warbler, etc.
Anticipate the elements, and bring a
lunch. Take I-5 N past Tejon Pass to the
Frazier Park off ramp, turn left and follow
Frazier Mountain Park Rd. bearing right
onto Cuddy Valley Rd. Meet at the "Y"
formed by the junction of Cuddy Valley
Rd. and Mil Potrero Hwy at 8:00 A.M.
Park in the obvious dirt clearing.

Saturday – Monday, July 14-16.

**Yosemite and Owens Valley with
David Yee.** Limited to 14 participants.
\$15 per day. This is probably the last
year to drive through the Valley without
the mandated shuttles. Have reservations
in the Valley or Oakhurst for July 13-14.
Send SASE for flyer and motel list.
Reserve rooms early.

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.

EVENING MEETINGS

MEETING LOCATION

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

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
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, May 8, 2001

Dillu Ashby

"Primates"

Dillu Ashby of the Los Angeles Zoo will explain why we are classified as primates and how saving them in the wild helps save the birds, and eventually ourselves.

Tuesday, June 12, 2001

Clair de Beauvoir

"Soaring Birds of Eilat"

Eilat, located at the southern tip of Israel on the Gulf of Aqaba, is a bottleneck on the migratory route between Africa and Eurasia. 1.5 billion birds make their way through these geographic turnstiles in the spring, flying from as far as South Africa to the Aleutian Islands. Clair de Beauvoir recently participated in an Earthwatch project assisting in research of the 280 species that pass Eilat every spring.

F I E L D T R I P S

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

Sunday, May 6 – Topanga State Park. **Gerry Haigh** will lead through this diverse coastal mountain area. An ideal trip for a beginning birder or someone new in the area. A biologist is often present. From Ventura Blvd., take Topanga Canyon Blvd. 7 miles S, turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Follow signs and turn left into Trippet Ranch parking lot, \$6 parking fee or park on the road outside the park. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, May 13 – 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 W (right) and turn left into the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. \$2 donation.

Saturday, May 19 – Santa Anita Canyon. Leader **Raymond Schep.** Take the 210 Fwy toward Arcadia, and take Santa Anita Ave. N to the parking lot at the very end of the road. Meet at the trail-head at the bottom of the lot. 4 mile round trip, moderately strenuous walk through oak and chaparral canyons. Good selection of breeding and migrating birds including warblers, Olive-sided Flycatcher, three hummingbirds, and Dipper possible. Pack a lunch. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

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