

WESTERN TANAGER



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LAAS Tour - March 2001

Okavango Delta . . . a guide's perspective

by Geoff Lockwood

How do you sum up a tour that took the group from the quiet home comforts of the Grace Hotel in the suburbs of Johannesburg to the unspoilt magic of the stunningly beautiful Okavango Delta in northern Botswana? Certainly, the list of species recorded on the trip – 244 birds, 33 mammals, four reptiles, and two frogs – tell part of the story but this trip gave us all so much more.

For my part, this was one of the best tours ever, thanks to some spectacular game and bird viewing and to the wonderful people that I was privileged to meet and lead on this tour. For most, this was their first experience of Africa and from the birding walk through Rosebank to the 11.5 hour game drive at Jao, their enthusiasm and genuine pleasure in the whole experience never flagged for a minute.

I had travelled with Olga Clarke on a previous

LA Audubon Society tour and had really enjoyed her company. At the airport, as we checked in for our flight to Botswana, it was clear that our group was going to work. Olga had taken the weight restriction of 24 pounds for our bags really seriously and as a result was carrying anything slightly heavy in her photographic jacket. She looked positively rotund and how she managed to walk at all under the weight remains a mystery.

Check-in provided more hilarity as Olga had a very patient official open what seemed to be hundreds of film canisters to ensure that they were all legitimate. In spite of Olga, our flight got off the ground and we were on our way.

Our arrival in Maun marked the start of birding in earnest, with wonderful close views of Abdim's Stork on the runway and our first Lilac-breasted Roller. The people who had drawn up the itinerary

got it just right, with the three camps visited giving us a good cross-section of the different scenery and activities that the Delta has to offer: boats, mekoros (dugout canoes), and game-drives.

The flight into Vumbura, our first camp, had all those with access to a window eagerly looking out for game – elephant, Cape Buffalo, giraffe, hippopotamus, Burchell's Zebra, wildebeest, and Red Lechwe were all sighted, with the eagle-eyes of Ellin contributing greatly to our list. The drive from the airstrip into camp set new



Olga Clarke and Geoff Lockwood, Jao Camp

records for the time taken over this short distance but with our first sightings of elephant (from the ground) and super birding we just couldn't help stopping every few yards. The highlight was the sighting of a Northern Carmine Bee-eater near the airstrip. (This is treated as a separate species by some authorities and would be the first record for southern Africa.) Other special moments from Vumbura were the unbelievable views of Lesser Jacana feeding quietly on a raft of floating vegetation right next to the boat followed shortly afterwards by sightings of a pair of Pel's Fishing Owls. Unbeatable, full-frame scope views of these Okavango icons were a wonderful way to start our trip! Mammals in the shape of a group of regal-looking Sable Antelope also provided excitement.

The flight into Chitabe featured more enthusiastic game-viewing from everyone, with Ellin again displaying her wonderful eyesight and intense interest in the large and furries. Driving into camp, we were treated to great views of a pair of African Hawk Eagles, along with a host of other bush birds. The tents in the camp had been improved since our last visit by the addition of outdoor showers, and most of the group took advantage to experience these before our afternoon drive. The veldt was looking unbelievably lush after excellent summer rains but we still managed to find two African Wild Dogs that had lost the rest



LAAS group – Birding Island, Botswana

of their pack and we were in prime position to watch the male make an unsuccessful dash after a group of young impala. Later, back in camp, we had unbelievable views of an African Scops Owl roosting in a Mopane sapling right next to the pool deck. This wonderfully obliging bird allowed the photographers in the group to approach to within two yards and sat quietly, ignoring the battery of camera shutter clicks and occasional flashes.

This was also Ralph's birthday and our afternoon drive took us along the water channel in front of camp. A wonderful interlude with a group of Vervet Monkeys enthusiastically feeding on the ripe fruits of a Marula tree ensued as the monkeys showed their displeasure at our close approach. They pelted us with fruit but fortunately refrained from resorting to other, more odoriferous ammunition. Our arrival at our destination for sundowners, Chitabe's Hippo Pool, coincided with one of the most spectacular sunsets of the trip. Ralph and the rest of the group got to see their first hippos surfacing through the reflection of the sunset sky – breathtakingly beautiful stuff and an unforgettable way to celebrate a birthday! The whole group was blown away. As it got darker I turned the telescope skywards and we enjoyed views of Jupiter and its moons (five visible), Saturn and its rings, Venus (showing phases like the moon), and then the moon.

Our last evening at Chitabe was equally memorable as the staff had laid on a surprise bush supper for us. As we

made for the site there was a radio-call to let us know that two lionesses with a young cub had just passed where the camp staff were setting up for our dinner. We were soon watching the trio walking steadily along a dry river bed – the cub enthusiastically running ahead to lie in ambush for the two females. Another radio-call alerted us to the fact that a male lion was following the scent trail of the departing females and we were soon treated to the sight of this splendid animal following in their tracks. At last, and well satisfied with our views of lion, we turned for the bush dinner site but more surprises were in store. Before dinner and in the middle of the African bush we were treated to a slide show detailing the ongoing research into the African Wild Dog or Painted Wolves. With the spoor of "our" lions in the dust at our feet we heard about the biology and behaviour of these special, highly endangered carnivores.

The staff had decided to serve us some examples of the local cuisine and after a wonderful meal we were treated to some exceptional singing and dancing by the staff. Their enthusiasm and humor was infectious and we were all soon joining in – a wonderful way to say goodbye to a special piece of Africa.

And so to Jao. Although our accommodation at Vumbura and Chitabe had been superb, the sheer luxury and scale of Jao was breathtaking. The raised walkway leading to the central dining area and on to the individual "tents" was up to twenty feet off the ground and our



Swainson's Francolin

accommodation was palatial. Over tea and before our first drive, Robin had us in stitches of laughter with her description of her roommate – Godzilla, a fearsome beast that turned out to be a rather small and harmless lizard known as a Striped Skink. In spite of our assurances, Robin remained unconvinced and for the rest of our stay kept us amused with updates on Godzilla's activities.

The habitat around Jao is typical Okavango floodplain which, at the time we were there, had dried out to leave a vast sea of short green grass dotted with small "islands" of palm trees. On our first drive that afternoon we came across two male cheetahs and we watched spellbound as they stalked a small herd of Lechwe. Unfortunately the grass was just too short and the Lechwe spotted the cheetahs pair before they were within range to realistically launch an attack and we missed the chance of a kill.

The next morning we headed off to a distant part of the concession where we hoped to see a different variety of birds along with more game. Some time later we were stopped watching a large bull elephant scratching himself against the trunk of a large Jackalberry tree. Suddenly and without any warning he came rushing forward in a spectacular mock charge. Miriam, who happened to be sitting right in the "firing line" and showing incredible self-control, gave us the

quote of the trip. With the elephant only yards away she was heard to say "I am starting to feel really uncomfortable right now!"

The drive back to camp after a very pleasant bush lunch turned out to be one of the best (and longest) I've ever had in the Delta. As we neared camp, the driver of one of the other vehicles radioed that he had found three lions. The group was keen so we turned away from camp in pursuit and were soon watching the lions half hidden amongst the palm trees of one of the many "islands". The storm that had been threatening finally broke, and as the lions retreated into the heart of the palms we headed for camp. As we pulled up in front of the camp the radio again crackled into life – this time leopard. The group, who only seconds earlier were looking forward to a shower and siesta instructed our driver to go – and go we did! After a hilarious high-speed drive we reached the spot where the leopard had been sighted only to hear that it had come down out of the tree where it had been spotted and disap-



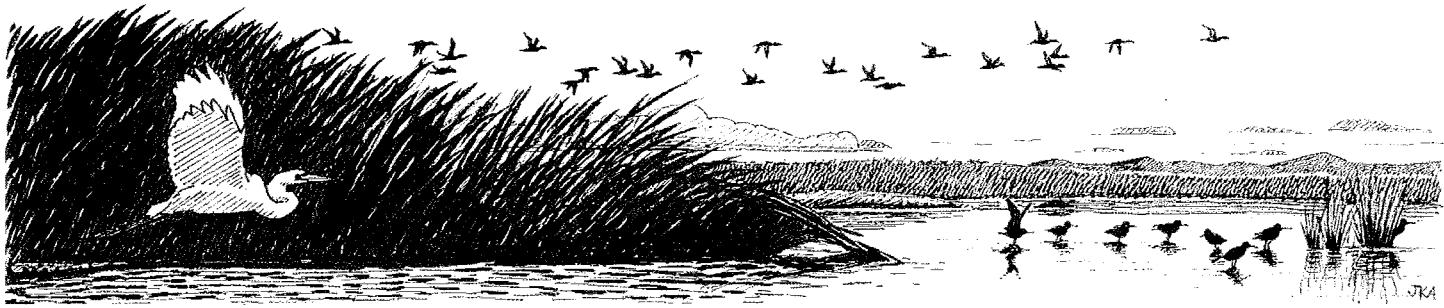
African Scops Owl

peared into the palms that formed part of the same "island". We slowly circled the cluster of palms searching for the illusive cat and as we drew level with our starting point we were lucky enough to catch the leopard out in the open, trying to cross to another clump of palms. It came streaking past the front of the vehicle and back into the shelter of the palms – a brief but wonderful view of this stunningly beautiful cat.

By now it was late afternoon – definitely time to head back to camp, but we hadn't finished with Jao's big cats just yet. On the way back to camp we came across the cheetahs. From their bulging stomachs they had obviously had better luck than while we had been watching them the previous evening. They were lying out in the middle of the grass but close enough to the road for us to be able to enjoy them. After spending some time with these "spotted sphynxes" we resumed our drive back to camp only to see a lioness walking purposefully in our direction. From the condition of her teats, it was clear that she had cubs and her behaviour suggested that she was heading back towards them. It was soon clear that her route would take her perilously close to the resting cheetahs. We



African Wild Dog



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

Dick Cheney is not only our Vice-President but our official Energy Czar. His views on our sources of power reflect the desires of an administration headed by two oil executives and a cabinet full of millionaires. This country, he says, needs more coal and oil, more electric power plants and – God help us – nuclear generators.

He told the press that "Conservation may be a sign of personal virtue, but it is not a sufficient basis for a sound, comprehensive energy policy." But the New York Times says, "Scientists at the country's national laboratories have projected enormous energy savings if the government takes aggressive steps to encourage energy conservation in homes, factories, offices, appliances, cars and power plants." Even without pressure from Washington, the higher cost of gasoline, electricity, and natural gas has made many of us turn out lights and combine our shopping trips more frugally. Imagine the savings if government gave us a shove.

The Administration is unhappy with the 19 new national monuments that were established by Bill Clinton last year. Like the unconscionable drive to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, lustful eyes are on the monuments where mining and oil exploration are prohibited. Clinton also declared 58 million roadless acres of national forests off-limits for road building and logging. The roads are built at public expense primarily for logging. Habitat is destroyed and wildlife loses its home. The timber companies have already gone to court and their congressional friends are cooking up plans to revoke the declaration.

George W. Bush and his Secretary of the Interior are enthusiastically in favor of drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic Refuge. The coastal plain is the birthing grounds for musk oxen, Arctic foxes, polar bears, wolves, grizzlies and a migrating herd of 130,000 caribou. It has been called one of the last true wilderness areas on earth. The oil industry says their superior technology will enable them to extract oil without disturbing the animals or the tundra. Formerly pristine Prudhoe Bay 60 miles away is now a miserable tangle of roads, pipelines, wells and sewage plants stewing in a million gallons of crude oil, diesel fuel and acid spilled every year. The Refuge will not escape a similar fate. And for what? Though big oil claims that 16 billion barrels of oil are there, the US Geological Survey says that an optimistic figure would be only 3.2 billion barrels, at most a six months supply. Experts estimate it would take ten years for the oil to reach west coast refineries – a long time to wait for gasoline prices to the public to come down. Environmentalists say that a program of conservation and increased fuel efficiency will allow us to save far more oil than the Refuge contains – faster, cleaner, and cheaper.

When George W. made his very first venture into European countries recently he was met by crowds of people carrying signs and shouting their disapproval of American attitudes toward the death penalty, Son-of-Star-Wars missile defense, and global warming. Promising during the presidential campaign to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, Bush reneged on his pledge. He drew serious opposition both at home and abroad

when he refused to accept the 1997 Kyoto Protocol signed by some 100 nations. Since the United States with only 5% of the world's population produces 37% of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming it is shameful that we will not take the leadership. Bush seems to refuse to believe that the planet's temperature is rising and he calls for more studies. Those studies have already been conducted. On February 19, 2001 the world's leading climate change scientists, sponsored by the United Nations, reported the threat to human populations through floods, drought, extreme weather, and increased ranges of infectious diseases. A January report by the same panel had projected an increase of as much as 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit and a global sea level rise of up to three feet by 2100. In responding to European criticism Bush said, "We will not do anything that harms our economy. Because first things first are the people who live in America." In June, Bush was in Sweden and said, though he did not want to take part in lowering global warming, he would not interfere with Europe's efforts. A month later, EU supporters of Kyoto are deeply concerned that the United States is planning to actively obstruct their goal. If that is true, said one critic, "It would show that the Bush administration has no concern for the environment at all, if it's not only going to keep the US out of the treaty but the rest of the world as well."

What makes George run? What are the roots of his beliefs? He comes to the White House as a wealthy man and he must view the dominance of his corporate friends in our society as a natural condition. Profit-taking is the name of

the game and if the Arctic Refuge must submit to the greed of Big Oil, so be it. Controlling greenhouse gases will cost industry a lot of money and, "first things first" are the American people. That money might arrest global warming and assure our descendants a better, safer world.

The inventory of anti-environmental insults that the Bush Administration has accumulated is long and crowded. The energy crisis is blamed on pollution controls that protect the health of power plant neighbors. Clinton banned snowmobiles from Yellowstone National Park but pressure from enthusiasts and manufacturers is about to kill the ban. Bush increased the arsenic level in drinking water to please the responsible mining interests. His cabinet choices are significant. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham says that cutting carbon dioxide emissions is too expensive. He's against making cars more fuel efficient and is partial to more coal-driven power plants. Abraham is a recently defeated senator from Michigan whose environmental record was so bad that the League of Conservation Voters gave him a big fat zero.

Perhaps Bush's crowning achievement was to appoint Gale Norton as Interior Secretary. She spent a lifetime defending property rights, representing big business clients in environmental matters, pressing for states rights over federal. Imagine this protege of James Watt spreading his biases over the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service. She takes a dim view of the Endangered Species Act that she must legally enforce.

So we are stuck with an administration that is solidly concerned with the goals of the rich and powerful whose money brought it into office. These goals are not shared by the great majority of citizens who, in every poll, have supported a clean, healthy, expansive environment. The fight to save the spacious skies and the purple mountains will go on. Conservationists will continue the tough job of opposing the bad guys and spreading the good ideas that will give us a livable world. 

OKAVANGO

continued from page 3

turned around and headed back. The cheetahs were still lying up, still oblivious to the approach of the lioness. The tension on the vehicle grew with each second as the lioness drew closer and closer. At the last possible moment the cheetahs spotted her and froze, crouching low in the grass. Fortunately the breeze was blowing from behind the lioness and she eventually passed not more than 30 yards from the cheetahs, and without even being aware of their presence in the grass. We all began breathing again.

Leaving the cheetahs we followed the lioness back to the original "leopard island" and watched as she crawled in under one of the denser palms where she had obviously hidden her cubs. In the space of one-and-a-half hours we had seen lion, leopard, cheetah and lion again – incredible viewing by any standards! We headed, finally, back to camp.

The next morning, our last in Botswana, was a relaxed peaceful affair after the hectic excitement of the previous evening. Driving along the floodplain we came across a "fish trap", a pool left by the receding floodwaters, and watched as statuesque Saddle-billed Storks, herons, darters, and Pied Kingfishers breakfasted on the trapped fish. A large crocodile, together with several hippos, added mammal (and reptile) interest. The early morning

light came from behind us, giving a fairytale quality to the scene. The photographers in the group fired off shot after shot, trying to capture the magical moment on film and then it was back to camp for a typically wonderful brunch. The drive to the airstrip for our flight back to Maun was a subdued affair, with all of us aware that our trip was fast coming to an end. Dee and Marianne were heading on to Zimbabwe and there were some hurried farewells at Maun and then the rest of the group boarded our flight to Johannesburg. At Johannesburg International Airport it was time for more farewells. We had met just over one week earlier as strangers and we were parting as friends. Together we had shared wonderful moments – laughter and companionship; spectacular sightings of animals and birds and a chance to experience a truly unique part of Africa.

I look forward to meeting you all again soon. "To another wonderful day in Africa – *hambani gashle* – Go well!"



Geoff Lockwood is a bird artist, lecturer and conservationist based at Delta Environmental Centre in Johannesburg. He is best known for his illustrations in Robert's Birds of Southern Africa and for his work with owls and oxpeckers.



Mokoro with poler

All photos by Olga Clarke

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Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithological Research Awards

Grant Recipients for 2001

The LAAS Executive Board is very pleased to announce the recipients of the Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithological Research Awards for 2001. This year, grants are being provided to four local students to support their projects studying bird behavior and ecology.

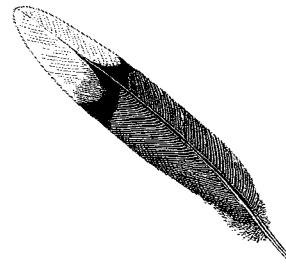
Nicole Alise Taylor, of the University of California, San Diego, was awarded \$1000 in support of her project: "Song-type Function and Variation in a Population of Red-faced Warblers". The goal of this study is to determine the function of song-type with respect to settlement patterns, territory defense, and species recognition in the Red-faced Warbler (*Cardellina rubrifrons*). This species is a socially monogamous ground-nester in which males establish contiguous breeding territories along steep-sided canyons. Male conspecifics are believed to use vocalizations in territory defense and advertisement for mates. To evaluate song-type function, a series of interactive playback experiments will be performed. Research will concentrate on quantifying the function of song-type in territory establishment and defense, and testing the hypothesis that certain song-types facilitate species versus individual recognition.

Matthew Amalong, of California State University, Long Beach, was awarded \$300 in support of his project: "Demography of the Black-necked Stilt". The Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) is a widespread species found in the wetlands of North America. The goal of this study is to determine: 1) the home range and/or territory size of breeding pairs, and 2) the dispersal and survival rate of young birds from hatching through their first year, for birds in the wetland system at the Bolsa Chica Ecological Preserve (BCER), Orange County, CA. The data obtained will be compared with similar information on other stilts and avocets and related shorebirds, and should be of use in planning for wetland restoration/mitigation at BCER and similar wetland systems.

Nathan Mudry, of California State University, Long Beach, was awarded \$768.50 to support his project: "The Behavior and Movements of Pre-breeding Santa Cruz Island Scrub-Jays". The Island Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma insularis*) is a morphologically distinct and isolated species endemic to Santa Cruz Island. Due to low mortality and saturated habitat, individuals delay breeding for up to 3-4 years. Unlike the Florida Scrub-Jay that exhibits a cooperative breeding system, the Island Scrub-Jay has pre-breeder "floater" individuals whose behavior is not fully understood. This proposal is to investigate questions pertaining to the movement and strategies employed by pre-breeding individuals, particularly from the time of fledging to the obtaining of a breeding territory. The study will test the null hypothesis that pre-breeding individuals disperse themselves randomly around established territories to locate territory and mate openings when they become available through death of a breeder.

Pamela Yeh, of the University of California, San Diego, was awarded \$2000 in support of her project: "The Effect of Urban Environments on the Ecology and Evolution of the Dark-eyed Junco". The recent establishment of a passerine bird, the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*), in an urban San Diego area provides unique opportunities for examining the effects of urbanization on bird populations. This project seeks to relate specific causes and effects of urbanization on a bird species, and focuses on how and why urban and mountain juncos differ in behavior and morphology. Phenotypic differences between urban and mountain populations will be examined; the roles of natural and sexual selection in causing trait evolution in the urban population will be evaluated; and the bioacoustics of an urban habitat and its effects on bird song will be investigated.

Congratulations to each of this year's Research Award recipients!



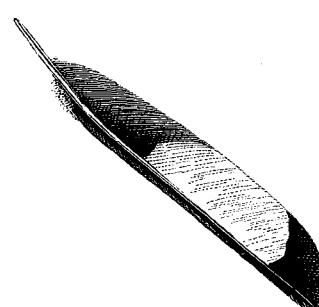
Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithological Research 2002 Applications being accepted

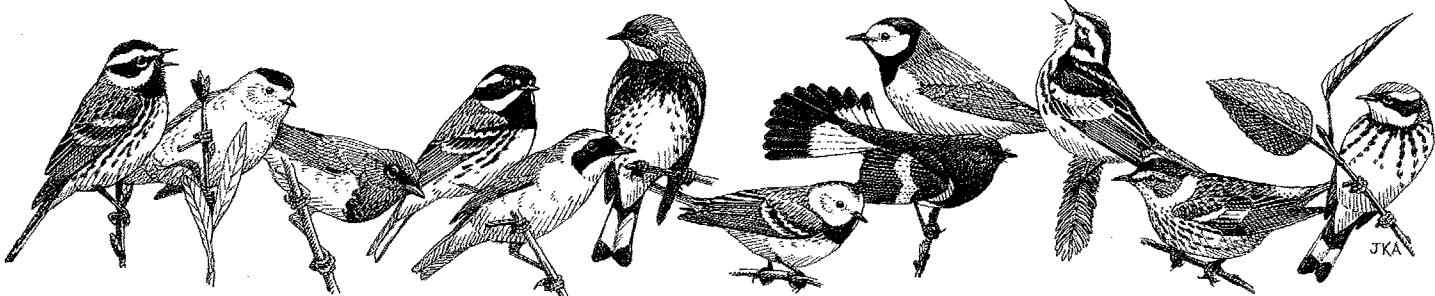
The Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Award, to support research relevant to the biology of birds, is an annual research grant presented by the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Award recipients are limited to students, amateurs, and others with limited or no access to major granting agencies and who reside in southern California (from San Luis Obispo, Kern, and San Bernardino Counties south) or are currently enrolled in a southern California academic institution. There is no geographical restriction on the research area.

The 2002 maximum individual award will be approximately \$2500. The application deadline for the 2002 Research Award is January 31, 2002; grants will be disbursed in May or June, 2002.

To obtain further details and application materials download the materials from the LAAS website: www.laaudubon.org or, e-mail to: grants@laaudubon.org or, contact:

Dr. Chas Cowell
Grants Committee Chairman
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
West Hollywood, CA 90046
or at: ccowell@elcamino.cc.ca.us





BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Daniel S. Cooper

In the last *Birds of the Season*, I wrote about the rewards of discovering previously unknown breeding populations of birds in our area, focusing on the Gray Vireo. Though no more reports of this species arrived, several other discoveries helped prove the point – summer is no time to hang up those binoculars. Most exciting were the results of a one-morning breeding bird survey of three flood control basins: Santa Fe, Hansen Dam, and Whittier Narrows, carried out on 14 June by myself and five other birders: Ed Barajas, Richard Barth, Kevin Clark, Kimball Garrett, and Mike San Miguel. We recorded 75 species among the three sites, including 17 singing Least Bell's Vireos, the Federally Endangered race endemic to southern California and adjacent Baja. Additional surveys this spring have turned up singing vireos in several soft-bottomed sections of the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo (Mickey Long). Other highlights included 37 Yellow-breasted Chats, two Swainson's Thrushes, that were probably nesting in the willow forest at Hansen Dam, and a pair of Horned Larks on a former gravel pit in the same area. Four Wood Ducks flushed out of the willow forest at Hansen may be nesting here as well.

One of the surprises of this survey was the discovery of no fewer than 36 territories of Yellow Warbler, in the basins, including several groups of fledglings. An abundant migrant throughout our area and common breeder in foothill canyons, they were widely thought to have been extirpated as a summer resident from much of the coastal lowlands of Los Angeles County following the widespread channelization of our streams. Yet this discovery, along with others (e.g.

two territories, with evidence of breeding, along the Los Angeles River in Atwater Village, Richard Barth) suggests that they might not be gone for good.

Warbling Vireo, another common migrant feared lost as a breeder from the Basin, may also be making a comeback. In early July, Richard Barth reported an active nest at Village Green, a tree-lined apartment complex in west Los Angeles! Although eastern Warbling Vireos (a different race) have adapted to urban areas,

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
P.O. Box 275
Imperial Beach, CA 91933-0275
e-mail: guymcc@pacbell.net

To report birds for the tape, call:

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

breeding in zoos and urban parks, our western bird has always been seen as an indicator of high-quality riparian habitat. One explanation for this and the Yellow Warbler's recent successes could be the gradual decline of Brown-headed Cowbirds in the landscape, inevitable as agriculture bows out of southern California.

Other nesting surprises came from the other side of town. Birding Bonelli Park in San Dimas on 2 June, Andrew Lee was amazed to find three active **Mountain Chickadee** nests placed in bluebird boxes! Though extensively planted with exotic pines, Bonelli is in the low San Jose Hills, several life zones below the native pine forests of the San Gabriel Mountains, where it would be expected to breed. Apparently, the surge in popularity of bluebird boxes in Orange and southeastern Los Angeles County is not only benefiting cavity-nesting species pushed out by starlings – it may be enticing out-of-range or wintering species to stick around and nest.

The status of **Summer Tanager** in our area is complex. Three singing males were back on territory along Big Rock Creek in Valyermo by 13 May (Kimball Garrett), an area where the local breeding race *cooperi* nests each year. Migrants, probably of the eastern *rubra* race, were at Ladera Park on 23 May and at Temescal Gateway Park on 31 May (both Richard Barth), and though a young male along the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena at Devil's Gate Dam on 22 June (Mike San Miguel) was probably an eastern vagrant, western *cooperi* has bred in past years along the southern base of the San Gabriel Mountains. The two races are depicted in the new Sibley guide, and females may actually be easier to separate than males.

A bird now rare everywhere (but possible anywhere) in coastal Los Angeles County, a **White-faced Ibis** was seen circling over Lake Balboa (Sepulveda Basin) by Andrew Birch in late May – probably a late spring transient – while an immature along the lower Los Angeles River on July 12 (Dan Cooper) was likely a post-breeding “wanderer”. Another species formerly more common in the area but now pitifully reduced, a **California Gnatcatcher** was seen and heard well in a coastal sage scrub restoration area along the Arroyo Seco in southwestern Pasadena on 21 June (Dan Cooper). With no (known) local population in the area, this bird was most likely a dispersing juvenile from the Montebello Hills, nine miles to the southeast.

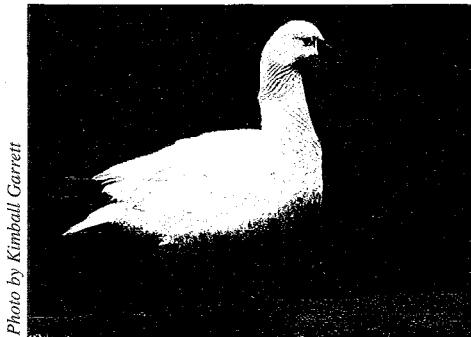
As for vagrants, late spring, while thrilling at desert oases, rarely brings major birding news to Los Angeles like the fall or winter season. One major exception this year was an adult male **Common Grackle** found on 24 May by Kimball Garrett (on the way to a birder's meeting, of course) at Lake Balboa in the Sepulveda Basin. The bird remained until 23 June, and is only the third record of the species for Los Angeles County. About mid-way in size and shape between a Brewer's Blackbird and a Great-tailed Grackle, birders should look for it wherever Great-tails congregate.

More expected but in an unusual location was a singing **Northern Parula** apparently summering along the Arroyo Seco north of Pasadena from 3 June until at least early July (Ron Cyger, for Tom Rahn). It favored a grove of alders along this shady canyon bottom, and was sharing a territory with a singing **Red-eyed Vireo** (heard only) on 4 July (Kimball Garrett). Other Northern Parulas included two males and a female in sycamores at Ladera Park in Ladera Heights from 21 May to 3 June (Richard Barth), and two other Red-eyed Vireos, decidedly less common in recent years, were reported from Temescal Gateway Park in Pacific Palisades on 18 May (Richard Barth) and from Torrance on 12 June (Mitch Heindel). Other eastern songbirds west included a female **Black-and-white Warbler** in Exposition Park on 16 May (Kimball Garrett), an **Indigo Bunting** at Banning Park in Wilmington the same day (Mitch Heindel), and **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** at Kenneth Hahn Park in the

Baldwin Hills (adult male) on 16 June (Richard Barth) and a female videotaped at close range at a Mt. Washington feeder on 28 May (Julian Donahue).

A **Steller's Jay** in the urban “flat-lands” of Pasadena on 7 June (Tom Miko) was almost unprecedented for the location and time of year. Like many montane birds that wander coastward, it might be expected during fall or winter, if at all (the species is strictly casual in Orange County). Also totally unexpected was a female **Red Phalarope** in breeding plumage at Malibu Lagoon in early June (reported on 6 June by Steve Sosenky for Muriel Kotin).

More predictable summer lingerers included a couple of **Brant** at Malibu Lagoon that are apparently summering (m. ob.), a **Ross's Goose** at Bonelli Park on 2 June (Andrew Lee), and several **Black-legged Kittiwakes** into early June along the coast of Pacific Palisades-Malibu (Richard Barth, John Feenstra) and at Cabrillo Beach (David Moody). Another Ross's Goose was in the Sepulveda Basin through the spring and summer and seems to have become a permanent resident.



Adult Ross's Goose, 27 May 2001 at Lake Balboa

Shorebirds, as expected, arrived on schedule in mid-summer. A count by Kevin Larson on 7 July revealed about 1000 peeps (Western and Least sandpipers) along the lower Los Angeles River between Willow St. and Long Beach Blvd., none of which were present the week before (Kevin Larson, Dan Cooper). By the time you are reading this, several species of sandpipers should be abundant along the stretch of the river from Rosecrans Blvd./105 Fwy south to Willow St. in Long Beach. The easiest access points are from the bike path at Willow St. (park in the residential area to the north or south), Del Amo Blvd., or from the south end of DeForest Park. 

Gull Workshop

Saturday, November 10, 2001 –

Gull Workshop. With **Jon Dunn** and **Kimball Garrett**. An illustrated workshop on the identification of North American gulls, covering plumage, structure, behavior, distribution, and hybridization. Jon is a collaborator on the Advanced Birding Video Series on North American Gulls, and chief consultant for National Geographic's Field Guide to the Birds of North America. As Ornithology Collections Manager for the LA County Museum of Natural History, Kimball is a repository for information on birds of the county, and is central in the LA County Breeding Bird Atlas project. He coauthored The Warblers of North America with Jon. 1:00 to 7:00 P.M., with a snack break. Send \$30 and a SASE to: LA Audubon Society c/o Millie 7377 Santa Monica Blvd. West Hollywood, CA 90046 (323) 876-0202 Event location: Eaton Canyon Nature Center, Pasadena. Limit: 100 signups.

Sunday, November 11, 2001 –

Gull Workshop Field Trip. **Jon Dunn** and **Kimball Garrett**. Doheny State Beach by Dana Point in Orange County. Meet at 8:00 A.M. This location often boasts the largest concentration of gulls in the coastal southland. Detailed directions at the workshop. Jon and Kimball will be addressing similar aspects of gull Identification and biology as those covered in lecture. Finish up by 1:00 P.M. Participation in the Saturday workshop is a prerequisite to signing up for this trip. Limit: 25. Send \$35 each to LAAS with SASE as above.

Saturday, November 17, 2001 –

Budget Gull Field Trip. **Nick** and **Mary Freeman** will lead at Doheny State Beach at 8:00 A.M. This trip is priced to allow budget birders to polish their new skills under quality leadership. Finish up by 1:00 P.M. Send \$10 and a SASE to LAAS as above for directions. All welcome. Limits: max: 20, min: 5.

Sunday, November 18, 2001 –

Budget Gull Field Trip.

Leader **Larry Allen**.

Details same as Nov. 17 trip.

WESTERN TANAGER

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EDITOR: Jean Brandt
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Tom Frillman
CONSERVATION: Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:
Kimball Garrett
FIELD TRIPS: Mari Johnson
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(323) 876-0202 – office
(323) 876-7609 – fax
(323) 874-1318 – bird tape

laas@LAAudubon.org – e-mail
www.LAAudubon.org – website



FIELD TRIPS

continued from page 12

Sunday, September 16 –

Ballona Wetlands. Bob Shanman will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland. Meet at the Del Rey Lagoon parking lot. Take the Marina Fwy (90 W) to Culver Blvd. and turn left for a mile, turn right on Pacific Ave. The lot is on the right. Lot or street parking is usually not a problem. Three-hour walk. Telescopes helpful.

Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, September 23 –

Sycamore Canyon and Oxnard Plain. Join Ray Schep for a moderate hike in Sycamore Canyon to look for chaparral birds and possible migrants. The group will then go to the Oxnard Plain to look for migrants and vagrants. Go north on PCH from Malibu to just past the Ventura County line.
Meet at the Sycamore Canyon entrance gate at 8:00 A.M. Bring lunch and a full tank of gas.

Saturday, October 6 –

Hansen Dam. Join Kimball Garrett to look for migrants, waterbirds and possible vagrants. Take 405 North to 118 E to 210 E, Exit Osborne Street. Exit ends at Foothill Blvd. Turn R for 200 feet and turn L into parking lot with sign of Hansen Dam Recreation Center. Meet at 7:00 A.M.

Sunday, October 7 –

Topanga State Park.
See September 2 for write up.

Sunday, October 14 –

Whittier Narrows.
See September 9 for write up.

Saturday, October 20 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area in Baldwin Hills.
See September 15 for write up.

Sunday, October 21 –

Ballona Wetlands.
See September 16 for write up.

LAAS TOURS

Zambia and Malawi – August 12-24, 2002

Wing your way to these stunningly beautiful countries with expert birder Derek Solomon. Optional extension to the Kalahari Desert and the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

South Africa and Namibia – October 21-November 7, 2002

Savor the diverse bird and animal life of scenic South Africa and Namibia, with renowned birder/author, Phil Hockey.

FOR ITINERARIES and MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Olga Clarke, Travel Director
LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY
2027 El Arbolita Drive
Glendale, CA 91208-1805 USA
phone/fax (818) 249-9511
oclarke@earthlink.net

**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.

LOS ANGELES ZOO TRIP

Saturday, October 13, at 8:30 A.M., **Kimball Garrett**, Ornithology Collections Manager of the Los Angeles Natural History Museum will be leading a walk along the LA River to enjoy the egrets, herons, stilts, ducks, and other wonderful creatures who hang out there. This event is sponsored by the Los Angeles Zoo and costs \$18 for Zoo members and \$23 for non-members. We will meet in the pocket park at the north end of Knox Avenue where the Glendale and Golden State Freeways cross. Call (323) 644-4211 between 8:30 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. – press 0 for reservations and a map.



**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: **Michael J. San Miguel** and **Mitch Heindel**.
\$70* – no galley.

**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: **Michael J. San Miguel** and **Mitch Heindel**.
\$50* – tea and coffee, no galley.

*** NOTE:** A \$5 energy surcharge may be necessary on any scheduled trip

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 **Kevin Larson**.

\$50* – 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.*

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday, September 11, 2001

"My Favorite Misidentifications"

Kimball Garrett

**Check the Website,
Bird Tape
(323) 874-1318
or Audubon House
(323) 876-0202
for meeting location.**

Start the fall with some bird identification tips from Kimball Garrett, LAAS member for 35 years and Ornithology Collections Manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Here's a chance for us to learn from our mistakes by analyzing what underlies so many recurring misidentifications. The slide-illustrated talk is presented by somebody who once misidentified a Coast Horned Lizard as a Western Tanager!

Christopher Stevenson from The Desert Institute at Joshua Tree National Park will begin the meeting with a short presentation about activities and options available to visitors of Joshua Tree.

Tuesday, October 9, 2001

"Grand Alaska"

Chuck Bragg

In June 1999, Chuck Bragg spent almost a month in Alaska. He visited Denali Park, the Kenai Fjords, Nome, Pribilof Islands, Gamble, Prudhoe Bay, and Point Barrow. In spite of being overwhelmed by the amazing wildlife and early spring vagrant birds of Alaska, he managed to take enough pictures to put together his Grand Alaska slide show. Chuck will also offer helpful hints on traveling to Alaska, when to go, how to go, where to go, what to expect, and what to pack.

He is a previous President of Santa Monica Audubon, and is our Western Region representative on the National Audubon Board.

With great regret we announce that Anne Eggleston will no longer be providing us with refreshments for our evening meetings. We want to thank her for her excellent service.

If you are willing to help with refreshments at this year's meetings please call Cheryl Epps at (213) 629-9755.

F E 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, September 2 –
Topanga State Park.** Gerry Haigh will lead participants through this diverse

coastal mountain area. An ideal trip for a beginning birder or someone new in the area. A biologist is often present. From Ventura Blvd., take Topanga Canyon Blvd. 7 miles S, turn E uphill on Entrada Rd. Follow 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, September 9 –
Whittier Narrows.** Leader: Ray Jillson. 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. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

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**Saturday, September 15 –
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area
in Baldwin Hills.** Leader: Ray Schep. Trips covering landscaped parklands and natural coastal scrub habitats are designed for beginning birder's 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.

continued on page 10