

WESTERN TANAGER



Volume 68 Number 3 January/February 2002

Los Angeles Audubon Society

My Friend Luis

*In Memory of Luis Baptista
(1941 – 2000)*

By Hartmut S. Walter

Luis met me one day in September 1967 during my first visit to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at UC Berkeley. I was the new postdoc from Germany. He was the Assistant Curator and showed me around after I had introduced myself to Professors Oliver Pearson and Ned Johnson. Luis was gregarious, charming, gracious, and most of all curious about people, birds, food, dialects, personal histories, classical music, and military history. A few weeks later I presented my dissertation topic (unraveling the ecology of Eleonora's Falcon) at one of the famous informal lunch seminars in the old museum hall. Afterwards, Luis came up and encouraged me to write an article about my work in "Pacific Discovery", the magazine of the California Academy of Sciences. He told me to meet him at the Academy in Golden Gate Park where he would introduce me to its director, Dr. Robert Orr. Sure enough, I was asked to write the article, completed it in awkward English which Luis bravely attempted to correct during a late night session. From then on, we spent a great deal of time together. Following here are some of the more personal memories I have of my closest American colleague, companion and friend.

Luis was very interested in Germany. He loved the music, read Clausewitz and other military classics when he couldn't fall asleep at night, and was greatly

indebted to German ethologists and aviculturists for their pioneering studies of bird behavior. I encouraged him to apply for a postdoctoral Friedrich Ebert Fellowship in Germany to study with Konrad Lorenz, K. Immelmann, and bird song expert G. Thielke. Luis applied and spent two years in Germany. At this time he spoke Portuguese, Cantonese, Spanish, English and German. His infectious personality and hunger for the minutiae of fish, bird, and insect behavior fascinated his hosts; he gave a wonderful talk at the annual meeting of the German Ornithologists' Association about his



Luis Baptista

research on the dialects of the White-crowned Sparrow. He spoke in German and performed his already famous whistling show of sparrow dialects to perfection. The audience gave him a standing ovation and he became a favorite of German ornithology 'pope' Professor Erwin Stresemann.

We lost contact for a while as I began to work in Africa. Shortly after my arrival at UCLA, however, Luis turned up in Eagle Rock as an ornithology professor and bird curator of the museum at Occidental College. He bought a house in Topanga and we met frequently with our families. He also gave some witty, exciting, and charming talks at the monthly meetings of the Los Angeles Audubon Society in Plummer Park; his audience loved him. After a few years, he got the wonderful appointment as Curator of Mammalogy and Ornithology at the California Academy of Sciences. We visited him often in the old house in the Haight-Ashbury area. There were always unorthodox people there, among them odd musicians, artists, and other foreigners like me. Our favorite pastime in San Francisco was visiting various pet stores with estrildid finches, doves, and parrots. In Chinatown, he would inspect tropical fish stores and engage in passionate discussion over cichlid behavior. To my amazement, he knew every species and variety thereof, and had personal experience with the breeding of all,

be they bird or fish. His listeners loved him and the aviculturists adored him because Luis had the golden touch. Under his gentle and unceasing care, just about any bird or fish healed, prospered, and reproduced. Indeed, Luis lived with his birds in his bedroom to monitor their singing and development during his Berkeley days.

He was not perfect, however. His organizational skills were poorly developed, and he occasionally rankled some bureaucratic personnel at the Academy because he favored research and education over the administrative issues pertaining to museum life. This could possibly be explained by the fact that he came from a well-to-do Chinese family in formerly Portuguese-held Macau; until his eighteenth year or so he had his own maid who looked after him. He also drove his cars as if he had cramps in his arms and could not see through the windshield, all the while focusing his mind on an interesting bird story. One night, he drove his old Mercedes against the local milk truck in rural Sonoma County. The car was gutted but he escaped unhurt. Financially, he seemed to be unlucky more often than not. He had leased his Topanga home to a rock band. The latter more or less trashed the house resulting in a long and bitter law suit. Luis never got his money back.

In spite of these setbacks, Luis prevailed, never lost his humor and faith in fellow humans, and amazed me with his incredible curiosity and ability to make students and people from all walks of life feel good about themselves. He also got them interested in ornithology. He was blessed with eager volunteers and dedicated staff who managed his affairs. He gave courses on natural history, bird behavior and song development at UC Davis, in the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada, and lectured all over the world.

Luis will remain most memorable to me with respect to our joint development of the Socorro Island Restoration Project. During one of his visits to

the southland, he had taken me to a dove breeder in Ventura. There, in the far corner of a long aviary, sat a largish dove. "You are looking at a species that is extinct in the wild!" Luis said and explained that this dove species was endemic to Socorro Island in the Mexican Pacific. It had vanished from there in the last twenty years, probably because of feral cats. Only about one hundred birds were still surviving in captivity, mostly in California. Since I had just completed a conservation symposium with Mexican officials and scientists, I responded: "Why don't we breed more doves and repatriate them to their ancestral island? You breed the doves, and I will try to get Mexico interested in the conservation work necessary for the return of the Socorro Dove." Luis was excited, we shook hands, and nothing happened for a few years.

I finally got a break in 1988. The Mexican Government flew me to Socorro and arranged for a series of research trips to this remote island some 480 km to the south of Cabo San Lucas. Luis, his friend Helen Horblit, Aradit Castellanos, and I spent a week on Socorro in early July 1988 to learn more about its birds and the factors that had caused the extirpation of the Socorro Dove. We accomplished a great deal and won the full cooperation of the local Navy garrison; it was Luis who charmed everybody. The island boss was Admiral Gordillo who loved classical music and military history. He was in heaven when he found a soul mate in Luis. Together, we developed the project as agreed upon. Luis

started an Island Endemics Trust (purpose: breeding endangered island birds) in the Bay area, I increased my collaboration with Mexican counterparts in La Paz and in Mexico City, and Admiral Gordillo tried to introduce environmental thinking into the Mexican Navy.

Luis fell in love with Socorro. The wrens duetted all around us and were so unconcerned about any human activity that they inspected our tents, cooking utensils, and even hopped onto a sleeping Luis inspecting his boots and pockets. The endemic towhee, parakeet, and even the Socorro Mockingbird (*Mimodes graysoni*) were very curious about us and our activities: we could watch them from a distance of just a few feet away. The most abundant bird of the island, the insular subspecies of the Tropical Parula, literally poked at the lens of my Canon camera as I tried to photograph it. All these experiences strengthened our resolve to protect this unique avifauna, rid it of the thousands of feral sheep and dozens of ferocious domestic cats surviving on their own in the mountain wilderness of Socorro. Luis played a key role in the designation of the entire Revillagigedo Archipelago as a Biosphere Reserve. He supplied the Mexican conservation office with an enormous stack of scientific works on the flora and fauna of these islands from the last 120 years. This material served as background and justification for the legal declaration made by President Salinas in 1984.

Unfortunately, the Government of Mexico changes dramatically every six years when a new President takes office and appoints a new cabinet and hundreds of administrators. In 1986, we suddenly lost our access to key Navy and conservation officials as our earlier contacts were promoted and moved to new assignments. The Mexican Navy only grudgingly embraced our conservation efforts. It has maintained its resistance to the removal of the habitat-destroying sheep because Navy officers enjoy hunting rams; they also see sheep as an emergency food source in case of a hurricane-caused interruption of food supplies from the mainland. This latter argument is clearly outdated by the existence of a large airstrip and the presence of freezers that can be run with batteries or propane gas. The sheep have to be removed as



Photos by Hartmut S. Walter


Luis Baptista on Socorro Island, December 1990

soon as possible. The unique flora and fauna of Socorro is simply too important for global conservation; continued degradation, denudation, and soil erosion is intolerable. Fortunately, Luis and I have stimulated a number of colleagues to join our project. Juan E. Martinez Gomez is a young Mexican biologist who distinguished himself with a fine field-based thesis on the Socorro Mockingbird. E. Ezcurra, P. Escalante, J. Jacobsen, and B. Tershy are scientists and conservationists on both sides of the border who are lending their expertise for the recovery of Socorro and eventual return of the Socorro Dove.

Luis published many important science papers. He edited a new edition of Welty's *The Life of Birds*. For the monumental *Handbook of Birds of the World* he wrote the general section on the pigeon family, summarizing our rapidly increasing knowledge of this large taxon. Shortly before his untimely death Luis was honored with a fine interview in the weekly science section of the *New York Times*. When in March 2000 I had the pleasure of talking to then 94-year-old Harvard professor and eminent evolutionist and ornithologist Ernst Mayr, I mentioned Luis' work and he responded: "There is really nobody else around who knows birds as well as Luis." I couldn't have said it better!



Singing White-crowned Sparrow
by Luis Baptista

Luis passed away on June 12, 2000 at his home in Sonoma County. On November 3, 2001, the California Academy of Sciences honored their illustrious former Curator with a symposium *Nature's Music: the Science of Bird Song*. And his birds? The White-crowned Sparrows from Oregon and Alaska have returned to my backyard for the winter season. They whistle their distinct dialects just like Luis did so many times. What a great way to be reminded of Luis' genius all season long! 

Dr. Walter is a professor in the Department of Geography at UCLA; he specializes in biogeography and conservation geography.

Audubon-California Works to Protect California's Wildlife and Open Space

California has one of the most biologically diverse landscapes in the world. Our rapid population growth and development threaten the well being of the habitats and resources that the state's animal and plant species depend on for survival. The California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) will provide essential funds to help preserve California's ecosystems and habitats, and improve our ability to enjoy already-protected natural areas that are accessible to the public.

Proposition 40, scheduled for the March 2002 ballot, will provide \$1.275 billion for land conservation and improved air and water quality, and \$1.325 billion for California's State and local parks, recreation, and historic and cultural resources. Passage of Proposition 40 will allow California to move forward in the effort to protect the state's wildlife and open space by allocating:

\$300 million to the Wildlife Conservation Board for the acquisition, development, restoration, and rehabilitation of habitat that promotes the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

\$445 million divided between eight State Conservancies, for land acquisition, particularly with a focus on land and water resources.

\$75 million for the preservation of agricultural lands, including oak woodlands and grasslands.

\$20 million to the State and Local Conservation Corps for acquisition, development, restoration, and rehabilitation of land and water resources.

\$225 million for State Parks for the improvement of existing parks, which will benefit wildlife by providing public education and quality habitat. Up to half of the funds can be used for land acquisition.

\$375 million for protection of water resources which would benefit wildlife that live in wetlands and those that live in the delicate riparian zone along rivers.

Audubon-California has endorsed the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 and has been working with other environmental groups, such as the Planning and Conservation League, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, Defenders of Wildlife and the Sierra Club on a campaign to promote the measure.

Please be sure to vote for this important bond issue and ask your friends and relatives to support it too! Additional information is available at <http://www.voteyeson40.org>.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

FEDS DELAY DECISION ON WATER RIGHTS APPEAL: The Idaho Supreme Court decided to deny water rights to the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge. The federal government has historically fought to provide essential water for parks, refuges, and other federal lands. The court's decision is being appealed to the U.S. Department of Justice, which is delaying its action. Unsurprisingly, Interior Secretary Gail Norton is telling the appellants to accept the decision but the environmentalists are concerned that if it is upheld other states will take similar action to cut off water for wildlife on federal land.

FLORIDA DOES IT AGAIN: Governor Jeb Bush has appointed a prominent development lobbyist to the state's wildlife commission which makes the final decisions on manatee protection regulations. This man has been lobbying for an exclusive Miami condominium (average value: \$1 million a unit) that wants suspension of manatee regulations so it can allow an increase in motor boats at their site. Environmentalists are fighting the appointment, emphasizing the impropriety of a wildlife commissioner making money by harming an already-endangered animal.


SNOWMOBILES AND THE NATIONAL PARKS: Every winter in recent years more than 66,000 snowmobiles roar through Yellowstone National Park, the first of our national parks. Teddy Roosevelt would roar back and kick them out if he was still around. Not only do these infernal machines blast the eardrums as they diminish the enjoyment of an incredible outdoor experience but they tear up the land and harm the animals. The exhaust

from the inefficient motors foul the air and the winter camper might as well be in Smogsville. After years of scientific study and debate the National Park Service decided to phase out the machines in the winter of 2003-2004. The off-road vehicle industry is up in arms, has taken the Service to court, and the Bush Administration has agreed to redo the decision. The ORV corporations are now looking greedily at Denali National Park with the vision of many more thousands of their products dancing in their heads.

MORE CONDORS IN OUR FUTURE? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering a plan to reintroduce California Condors into Colorado, Utah and New Mexico. Working with state and private groups, the service is looking for a release of 20 birds a year with the ultimate goal of 150 free-flying birds in 10 years. At the moment there are 35 wild birds in California and 25 in Arizona with 130 birds in captivity. We recall the heated controversy that marked the decision many years ago to capture the handful of condors still in the wild and breed them. Opponents of this daring idea included prominent environmentalists who felt that if it was time for the noble birds to pass into history perhaps we should let them go. Fortunately they were wrong.

ARSENIC – STILL IN THE NEWS: One of the first presidential thrusts into environmental matters of George W. Bush was to increase the public's exposure to carcinogenic arsenic in drinking water from Clinton's 10 parts per billion to 50 parts. After vigorous complaints by environmental groups and ordinary citizens the administration began to waver and worry about

public opinion. Both houses of Congress passed a bill to force the EPA to change the standard. New research by the National Academy of Sciences revealed that even tiny amounts of arsenic could increase the rate of lung and bladder cancer. Christie Whitman, EPA administrator, lowered the standard to 10 parts per billion, eight months after she had increased it to 50 parts. Sometimes you win one.

"BOLSA CHICA WETLANDS RESTORATION APPROVED": This headline in the L.A. Times (November 14) is most welcome news. The State Coastal Commission voted unanimously for the \$100 million project that will bring back the ocean to the wetlands. Around the turn of the century duck hunters, to improve the area for their sport, filled in the natural inlet that then united the beach and the ocean to Bolsa's current land-locked wetland. The new plan will cut a 360 foot-wide swath through the beach and the highway that will restore the wetland to its former condition and build a bridge over the new inlet to accommodate the traffic. It is expected that ocean water will raise the water level and improve circulation throughout the wetland. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service planners are jubilant over the Commission's vote, joined by environmentalists who have worked for decades for positive change. Bolsa Chica's small islands have been a splendid nesting area for large numbers of terns and Black Skimmers. And the marshy wetland has been a well-known migratory stopover for unusual shorebirds and ducks. The project will start in 2003 and will take three years to complete. Effusive thanks to the Coastal Commission and the Fish and Wildlife Service. 

Starr Ranch Natural History Classes

Instructor: Dave Bontrager

STARR RANCH THROUGH THE SEASONS:

Come have some fun in the field at Starr Ranch and experience first hand how our plant and animal communities change through the seasons. We will conduct seasonal field surveys to track bird, mammal, and insect populations. We will tag and follow individual plants through dormancy, growth, flowering, fruiting, and dispersal. At the same time we'll observe and record the ever-changing groups of animals that utilize these plants from stage to stage. This is primarily a field class with some supplemental classroom time. This class is designed for people with a range of experience, including beginners. Students must register for the entire cycle of eight classes.

Dates: 8 A.M.-1 P.M. on Sundays: February 10, 17; May 12, 19; July 14, 21; October 20, 27.

Cost \$75 Class Limit: 20

STARR RANCH NATURE WALKS:

Come explore the sanctuary on four Saturday morning walks this spring. We will look at everything from birds, mammals, and reptiles to insects and spiders. And when we can't find the animals, we will look for the signs they leave behind. And if we can't find their signs, we will look at the sanctuary's plants and their incredible array of adaptations for drought and fire, as well as their varied defenses against the foraging hoards that want to eat them alive. Much of the walking will not be on trails and may involve steep slopes. Hiking boots or very sturdy walking shoes are in order.

Dates: 8 A.M. - noon on Saturdays: February 9, 16; March 23.

Cost: \$50 Class Limit: 18

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF STARR RANCH PLANTS:

This popular class includes topics such as:

Flowers and Pollination: A tale of subterfuge, thievery, and deception.

Seeds and Seed Dispersal: How plants travel.

Plants and their Herbivores: Feeding the multitudes.

Spines, Thorns and Stinging Hairs: The plants' physical armory.

Plant Chemical Defenses: From deterrents to lethal toxins.

Escaping the Annual Drought: How Starr Ranch plants survive the long hot summer.

The Natural History of Weeds: Is a weed more than just a nuisance?

And lots more, including extended time in the field, studying plant identification and plant-animal relationships.

Dates: 8 A.M.-1 P.M. on Wednesdays: Feb 6, 13; March 20, 27; May 8, 15; July 10, 17.

Cost: \$75 Class Limit: 20

RESERVATIONS: Call (949) 858-0131

QUESTIONS: contact Dave in Oregon at (541) 937-3970 or dbontra243@aol.com or call us at the Ranch (949) 858-0309.

Birding 101 Spring 2002

Due to the numerous requests we have received for another "Birding 101" class, a new series of beginning bird-watching classes will be offered in the spring.

This series will emphasize a "hands-on, learn-while-doing" approach to field identification and discovery of prime, nearby birding locales.

One introductory lecture covering birding basics plus tools and techniques of bird identification will be held at Audubon House, Plummer Park from 7-9 P.M. on Thursday, March 21, 2002.

Three field classes will follow on Saturday mornings, March 23, March 30, and April 6, each in a different habitat.

Our spring instructor will be well-known expert birder Karen Johnson.

Cost for the series will be:

\$45.00 for members of Los Angeles Audubon \$55.00 for non-members.

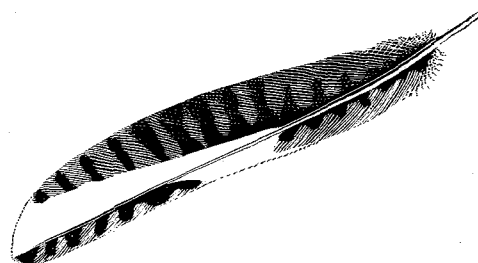
(Not a member? Join while enrolling in the class, \$65.00 will cover the class and a one-year membership.)

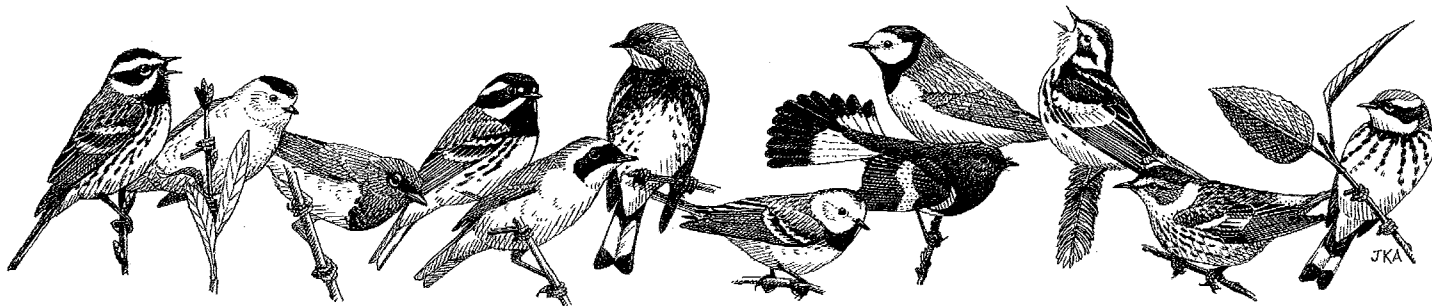
To enroll send your name, address, phone number, and check to:

Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
West Hollywood, CA 90046
Attn: Birding 101

Class is limited to 15 participants.

Enroll today!





BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Daniel S. Cooper

This late fall season was typically exciting, with a good showing of vagrants and other out-of-range species throughout the period. Notable ornithological phenomena visiting the Los Angeles area included a small invasion of American White Pelicans and the appearance of several interesting owls.

Starting with the pelicans, a little background is needed. We have two species of pelicans in the U.S., a small (well, for a pelican), dark coastal bird called the Brown Pelican, and a larger, mostly white bird called the American White Pelican. The Brown Pelican burst into the headlines during the 1960s and 70s, when the pesticide DDT was causing eggshell-thinning of several breeding piscivorous birds in the U.S., with our local race of Brown Pelican hit especially hard. While the Brown Pelican is slowly re-gaining lost ground in California, the plight of the American White Pelican has been almost as dramatic but is far less widely known. It is among a suite of uniquely American species that breed in a network of marshy depressions scattered across the western states from northeastern California to Minnesota, north well into Canada. Others in this group include Eared Grebe, Wilson's Phalarope, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. But unlike these other species, the white pelican requires a consistent supply of good-sized fish, which automatically limits it to large, permanent wetlands. They also need their islands. Being large, easy targets for predators, colonies built on lakeshores (as opposed to on islands) often fail, as do those on lakes with large fluctuations in water levels throughout the summer. Up until the late 1800s, they bred throughout California, but during the 1900s, colonies dwindled to just two nesting areas in the state near the Oregon border – the Klamath Basin and Clear Lake, just to the west.

Historically, huge flocks of white peli-

cans would drain out of the west in the fall and congregate on California's wetlands along the coast and in the Central Valley (as well as in Mexico). As these habitats shrank and many vanished, most of our wintering pelicans are found at the Salton Sea. Today, only small, scattered groups over-winter away from the Salton Sea (e.g. Morro Bay), but their status in the Los Angeles area has long been marginal, even in migration.

On 22 October, I was a bit surprised to see three **American White Pelicans** gliding south over Highland Park, but small numbers overhead are possible just about anywhere in fall. On 28 October, Kevin

Larson looked up to see 110 of these magnificent birds circling over the lower L.A. River in Long Beach – a large aggregation, but again, these were assumed to be south-bound birds, possibly en route to the Salton Sea. About a week later, I counted 110 birds over, once again, Highland Park. But these birds weren't heading south – they were heading west. That afternoon (5 November), I got a call from Camera DiJulio of Los Feliz, who was outside when – you guessed it – 110 American White Pelicans flew over her neighborhood. And these birds were also heading west. The next day, she had about a third as many birds, also moving west through dense fog. Two days later (8 November) Sepulveda Basin naturalist Muriel Kotin was thrilled to see a large group of white pelicans on the lake at the wildlife area. She counted 109. The next day there were at least 130, and on the afternoon 10 November, I counted no fewer than 150 birds paddling for fish in the lake and loafing on the shore. Whether these birds will winter or they are just passing through remains to be seen. Numbers at Sepulveda have apparently been increasing for the past four or five years, but only a handful ever spend the winter in the L.A. area.

Other scarce and imperiled California species made news this season, with a **Burrowing Owl** purportedly obtained in "East L.A." being dropped off at the Pasadena Humane Society (to Jennifer Hodgen) on 7 November (the finder could not be located). This charismatic bird, once abundant throughout the Los Angeles area, was returned to the "wild" – the undeveloped, grassy hills above El Sereno – the next day. Almost as surprising was a **Western Screech-Owl** calling in residential Temple City on 31 October (Mickey Long), a bird virtually unknown on the urbanized floor of the L.A. Basin.

The find of the season was undoubtedly the **Elf Owl** found injured by a cat in

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

a yard in the Whittier Hills on or around 28 September, which should furnish the first record (fide Dan Guthrie) for Los Angeles County, and probably the only California record away from the desert. A highly-migratory species within its normal range from Arizona and Texas into Mexico, it joins other spectacular finds brought to Los Angeles-area wildlife rehabilitators – Laysan Albatross and Yellow Rail come to mind.

Other noteworthy raptors included a late **Swainson's Hawk** at Hansen Dam on 3 November (Kimball Garrett), and two other species trying to make it in hostile urban territory – a migrant **Prairie Falcon** along the L.A. River in Atwater Village on 25 September (Richard Barth) and a pair of **Golden Eagles** at Bonelli Park in San Dimas seen on 6 October by Andrew Lee who wrote (*via email*) “it would be interesting if a few Golden Eagles breed locally in the San Gabriel Valley. I've seen Goldens at Bonelli several times but always single birds. This past winter (2000-01) at Santa Fe Dam I saw a pair quite consistently from January to April.”

The shorebird of the season was the **Ruff**, but how many Ruffs were involved is anyone's guess. Kevin Larson documented what looked like two separate juveniles along the lower L.A. River in Long Beach from 1-16 September and from 7-20 October, with no sightings (and lots of looking) in between. An apparent adult female was there on 10 November (Dan Cooper) just before a major rainstorm radically altered the habitat. Other shorebirds included a late **Pectoral Sandpiper** in the same area on 3 November (KL), a late **Baird's Sandpiper** at Harbor Park on 14 October (Mitch Heindel) and a **Dunlin** on time but inland at Hansen Dam the same day (KG).

Interesting coastal birds inland included a young **Sabine's Gull** at Bonelli Park on 23 September (Martha Esterson) and **11 Red-breasted Mergansers**, a juvenile **Mew Gull**, and a second-winter **Heermann's Gull** (all KG) on Lake Palmdale in the southern Antelope Valley on 4 November.

Kingbirds made news this fall, with five of the six species recorded in California present. The returning **Thick-billed Kingbird** was at Cal Poly Pomona at least as early as 3 November (Andrew Lee). Two **Eastern Kingbirds** appeared, far from a regular migrant through our area, with birds in Monterey Park on 25 September (Jane Strong) and in Topanga Canyon State Park on 8 October (Gerry Haigh). A

Tropical Kingbird was found at Malibu Lagoon on 4 October, (KG) who also found a late **Western Kingbird** at Hansen Dam on 3 November. Other flycatchers expected in low numbers included a **Vermillion Flycatcher**, represented by an adult male and a young female at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on 20 October (RB) and another young female at Harbor Park in Wilmington 26-31 October (Steve Sosensky). Possibly attempting to winter, a **Gray Flycatcher** was at the L.A. County Arboretum in Arcadia on 10 November.


Vireos also made a good showing, with a rare **Philadelphia Vireo** at Harbor Park on 14 October found by Martin Byhower, et al and a **Yellow-green Vireo** in the same park on 25 October seen only by Mitch Heindel. The late August **Cassin's Vireo** at Peck Rd. Park was apparently a harbinger of a good movement of this species through the basin – Richard Barth reported four this fall, and three separate birds were seen on the late date of 3 November: Hansen Dam (KG), Bonelli Park (AL) and Legg Lake in El Monte (DC). At least six **Plumbeous Vireos** were reported, of which at least a few should winter.

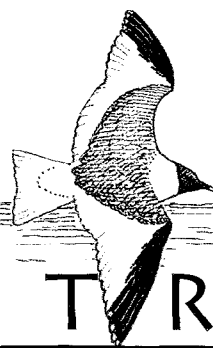
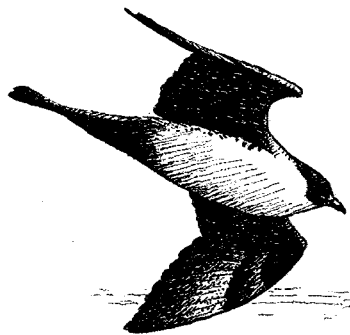
Well-worked vagrant traps along the coast produced several exciting migrants this fall. At tiny (yet lushly-planted) Sand Dune Park in Manhattan Beach, these included a **Winter Wren** on 16 September (Tom Miko), an **Indigo Bunting** and a **Clay-colored Sparrow** 23 September (TM), **Scott's Oriole** 18 October (Lori Conrad), **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** 27 October (KL) and **Rock Wren** 11 November (RB). Nearby Wilderness Park held a female **Black-throated Blue Warbler** 7 October (AL) and a **Baltimore Oriole** 30 September (LC). Another **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Banning Park 14 October (MH) and another **Clay-colored Sparrow** was present 24-28 October at Kenneth Hahn Park near Culver City (RB).

Other notable South Bay reports included a young **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Harbor Park on 28 October (MH), **Prairie Warbler** at Charles Wilson Park in Torrance 9-15 October (MH), **American Redstart** at Madrona Marsh 14 October (TM), **Summer Tanager** at Banning Park in Wilmington 7 October, a female **Orchard Oriole** at the South Coast Botanical Gardens in Palos Verdes 23 September (KL) and a fly-over **Common Grackle** in Torrance 27 September (MH). Still along the coastal plain, Ladera Park in west Los

Angeles produced a **Magnolia Warbler** on 30 September (RB), and other was reported from Banning Park on 4 October (TM).

A **Black-throated Green Warbler** was an unexpected treat for Richard Barth on 10 November along Franklin Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains. More regular eastern warblers included five **Tennessees**, five **Blackpolls**, three **Chestnut-sideds** and two **Palms**, including an early individual at Leo Carrillo State Beach on 22 September (Jon Feenstra). The only **White-throated Sparrow** reports so far have been in Bonelli Park on 8 October (Rod Higby) and Arcadia from 5 November (Mike San Miguel). **Bobolink** again appeared during a narrow window this fall, with five counted at Peck Rd. Park in El Monte on 7 October (AL). Our rarest swallow, a lone **Purple Martin** graced Malibu Lagoon on 16 September (DC).

Three significant observations of enigmatic (in our area) bird species came in. Most exciting was what may be the first Los Angeles County record of “**Woodhouse's**” **Western Scrub-Jay**, a race normally confined to the Great Basin ranges of Mono, Inyo and San Bernardino Co. that makes occasional forays into our deserts. One was heard and seen by Mike San Miguel on 29 October along a windbreak east of Lancaster. What may be a small, previously unknown population of **California Gnatcatchers** was observed by Karen Mabb in mid-October south of Amar Rd. in the City of Walnut. This site, currently being torn up for subdivisions, lies at the southwestern end of the San Jose Hills, the same beleaguered range that includes known populations of gnatcatchers at Cal Poly Pomona, along Walnut Creek and at Bonelli Park. And finally, the observation of a single **Large-billed Savannah Sparrow** (the breeding race in the Gulf of California) on a remote stretch of rock jetty in Los Angeles Harbor during a pelagic trip on 13 October (MH) brings the L.A. County total to three for the season; the regular wintering bird at the mouth of Ballona Creek was joined by a second individual on 9 October (RB). Once (early 1900s) a common sight along the coast, this bird appears to be making a bit of a comeback, with small numbers in fall and winter at places like Bolsa Chica Ecological Area. Behaving more like a bulky White-crowned than a “typical” Savannah Sparrow, be on the lookout for this larger, paler subspecies anywhere along the immediate coast (breakwaters, wet weedy patches), and keep the reports coming. 



PELAGIC TRIPS

Saturday, February 23 –

Palos Verdes Escarpment to the Redondo Canyon. Eight-hour trip departs from San Pedro at 7:30 A.M. on the R/V Vantuna. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Short-tailed, Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarity: Ancient Murrelet. Gray whales and dolphins are often seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kevin Larson, and Bernardo Alps.**

\$45 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, May 4 –

Marina del Rey and out to sea. The R/V UCLA Seaworld departs from Marina del Rey at 6:00 A.M. on this 12-hour trip. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine Jaeger; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Common Murre; Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: puffins (twice in 15 years). Gray whales and dolphins are seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kevin Larson, and Bernardo Alps.**

\$50 with a \$5 student discount – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, June 8 –

Landing on Santa Cruz Island at Prisoner's Cove. Eleven-hour trip departs at 8:00 A.M. from Island Packers dock in Ventura on the M/V Jeffrey Arvid. The endemic **Island Scrub-Jay** is easily seen here. We will then cruise south of the island toward Anacapa for pelagic species. Birds on prior trips: Northern Fulmar, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine Jaeger; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Pigeon Guillemot; Xantus's Murrelet. Rarities: Buller's and Flesh-footed shearwaters. Leaders: **Mitch Heindel and Kevin Larson.**

\$69 – no galley.

Saturday, August 3 –

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. Birds seen on prior trips: Red-billed Tropicbird; Black, Least and Leach's storm-petrels; Long-tailed Jaeger; South Polar Skua; Sabine's Gull. Rarities: Black-footed Albatross, Buller's Shearwater; Arctic Tern; Craveri's Murrelet. Blue Whales and several species of dolphins have been seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kimball Garrett, David Pereksta, and Kevin Larson.**

\$140 – price includes three meals.

Saturday, September 7 –

Northern Channel Islands Monument Trip: Anacapa, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz Islands, toward San Miguel Island.

12-hour trip departs from the Oxnard Marina at 7:30 A.M. on the M/V Vanguard. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Pink-footed, Sooty and Black-vented shearwaters; Black, Least and Ashy storm-petrels; cormorants (three); Sabine's Gull; Arctic Tern; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Common Murre; Craveri's and Xantus's murrelets; Cassin's Auklet. Rarities: Buller's and Flesh-footed shearwaters; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger. Blue, Finback and Humpback whales have been seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, David Pereksta**

\$79 – Galley on board.

Saturday, October 12 –

From Marina del Rey out to sea toward the Channel Island National Monument.

Twelve-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 6:30 A.M. on the R/V UCLA Seaworld. Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar; Pink-footed, Sooty and Buller's (rare) shearwaters; Black, Ashy and Least storm-petrels; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; Sabine's Gull; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: South

Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger; Common Murre; Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kevin Larson and Bernardo Alps.**

\$50 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, October 26 –

San Pedro Channel past the east end of Santa Catalina Island toward San Clemente Island.

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 five); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets; Xantus's Murrelet. Rarities: Long-tailed Jaeger; South Polar Skua; and perhaps Red-billed Tropicbird. Several species of dolphins as well as Elephant Seals are seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kimball Garrett, and Kevin Larson.**

\$59 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, November 9 –

Ventura Marina toward San Miguel Island

on the new fast Catamaran M/V Islander. Nine-hour trip departs from Ventura at 8:00 A.M. and returns by 5:00 P.M. After dropping off campers on Santa Cruz Island, we have the boat to ourselves, and head toward the 1000 fathom water about 10 miles from San Miguel Island. Birds seen this time of year which are expected: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Black Storm-Petrel; South Polar Skua; Pomarine Jaeger; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Craveri's Murrelet; Rarities: Leach's Storm-Petrel; Flesh-footed and Buller's shearwaters; Black-footed Albatross, perhaps Laysan Albatross.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kevin Larson, David Pereksta and Bernardo Alps.**

\$79 – full galley on board.

LAAS TOURS

Zambia and Malawi – August 12-24, 2002

Wing your way to these stunningly beautiful countries with expert birder, author, and lecturer Derek Solomon. Optional 6-day Post Extension to Malawi, returning August 30, 2002.

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

The Best of Birding and Wildlife Viewing in South Africa and Namibia, with renowned naturalist/birder and co-author of the Sasol Birds of Southern Africa, Professor 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
e-mail: oclarketravel@earthlink.net

Thank you —
Amy Walton

Los Angeles Audubon Society has recently received a bequest from the estate of Amy Walton. This bequest was left to honor her cousin Ruth E. Parker of Ventura California for her teaching career and contributions to science. In 1985, at the age of 86, Ms. Walton wrote that she was including LAAS in her estate but she hoped to live to be 105. She passed away July 4, 1999. LAAS would like to acknowledge the gift, and the help of her nephew, Gilbert Walton.

A Wetlands Festival in the Heart of the Pacific Flyway

California Duck Days 2002 . . .

Enjoy the BEST of the Pacific Flyway

One of California's premier wildlife viewing festivals, California Duck Days will be held February 15-17th, 2002, in the Sacramento Valley region. The festival coincides with the Central Valley's peak migration period of hundreds of thousands of birds traveling down the Pacific Flyway. The event features field trips, workshops, demonstrations, and a large Exposition Hall full of educational displays about wetlands and other Central Valley wildlife habitats. The headquarters for all festival activities is the Veterans Memorial Center in Davis, 203 E. 14th Street.

This fun, family-oriented festival includes over 40 field trips to view and learn about wildlife areas throughout the Central Valley, many on private land not normally available to the public. The diverse workshop topics include duck calling, decoy carving, waterfowl identification, wetland protection, waterfowl hunting, farming for wildlife and much more. Baby ducklings, live entertainment and an Exhibition Hall full of hands-on activities, displays, and over 40 different organizations concerned with wildlife and habitat protection will also be on hand to entertain the whole family.

Sponsors of California Duck Days include the Yolo Audubon Society, California Waterfowl Association, Capital Public Radio, City of Davis, First Northern Bank, Hallmark Inn, Sierra Club of California, Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter, Yolo County, BV Winery and the University of California at Davis.

California Duck Days is an educational, nonprofit event that inspires people about wetlands and wildlife of the Central Valley in a fun, family-oriented atmosphere. A one-day, on-site-only pass is just \$8. A one-day field trip pass is \$25 and a weekend pass that includes all field trips and on-site events is only \$40. Children 16 and under are admitted free.

For more information, call (800) 425-5001 or (530) 758-1286, or visit www.duckdays.org.

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.*

Published by
Los Angeles Audubon Society,
a chapter of
National Audubon Society.

EDITOR: Jean Brandt
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Tom Frillman
CONSERVATION: Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT:
Kimball Garrett
FIELD TRIPS: Mari Johnson
PELAGIC TRIPS: Phil Sayre
PRINTING: Holden Color Inc.

Opinions expressed in articles or letters
herein do not necessarily express the
position of this publication or of LAAS.

PRESIDENT:
Richard Epps
1st VICE PRESIDENT:
Raymond Schep
2nd VICE PRESIDENT:
Dexter Kelly
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:
Mildred Newton
RECORDING SECRETARY:
Anne LaHue
TREASURER:
Cheryl Epps

Annual membership in both societies is
\$35 per year and \$20 for new members
for their first year. Members receive the
Western Tanager newsletter and *Audubon*
magazine, a national publication. Renewals of membership are computer-
ized by National Audubon and should not
be sent to LAAS; however, new member-
ships may be sent directly to LAAS.
Make check payable to the National
Audubon Society.

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

Los Angeles Audubon Society
Headquarters, Library
and Bookstore are open to the public
Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

(323) 876-0202 – office
(323) 876-7609 – fax
(323) 874-1318 – bird tape

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

Printed on Recycled Paper



FIELD TRIPS

continued from page 12

Sunday, January 13 –
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.

Saturday, January 19 –
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area
in Baldwin Hills. Leader: **Chuck Bragg.**
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, January 20 –
Ballona Wetlands. **Bob Shanman** will
be leading this trip to our nearest wet-
land. Meet at the Del Rey Lagoon park-
ing 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. Tele-
scopes helpful.
Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, January 26 –
Antelope Valley Raptors and Other
Wintering Birds. Leader: **Jean Brandt.**
Come prepared for a full day of ducks,
raptors, and other wintering birds. Wear
warm clothes, bring lunch, and have a
full tank of gas. Meet at Denny’s at
6:45 A.M. Take the 405 Fwy N to Rox-
ford in Sylmar. Turn right, then right
again into Denny’s parking lot to arrange
car pools.
Trip leaves promptly at 7:00 A.M.

Sunday, February 3 –
Topanga State Park.
See January 6 for write up.

Sunday, February 10 –
Whittier Narrows.
See January 13 for write-up.

Saturday, February 2 –
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area
in Baldwin Hills Clean-up.
See January 5 for write-up.

Sunday, February 17 –
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.
Leader: Kimball Garrett.
See January 19 for write up.

Saturday and Sunday, April 6 and 7 –
Owens Valley Grouse Trip.
Mary Freeman leads. Limited to 20.
Meet early in Big Pine Saturday. To sign
up, send \$12 and a SASE to LAAS.
More details in mailer.
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 Satur-
day for most reservation services.

LAAS Needs Your Help

The world is changing so fast these days that it is time to plan for the future of the Chapter. To this end, your Board of Directors and Committee Chairs will be meeting mid-January to assess our mission and goals. It would be extremely helpful to receive input from our members – any input – positive or negative. Replies do not have to be signed. Some of the things that we are interested in knowing are as follows but you will probably think of others:

What do we do right?

What do we do wrong?

What could we improve?

What should we add to our activities?

Do you support the LAAS Bookstore? What could be done to improve it?

Do you participate in field trips? Do you have any suggestions for changes in field trips?

Are you interested in our International trips? Do you have any suggestions for these trips?

Do you attend evening meetings? Why don't you come to evening meetings?

Are our programs of interest to you? What topics would interest you?

Do you read the *Western Tanager*? Do you have any suggestions for content or changes?

Have you seen our web site? Do you have any comments?

Would you become involved in LAAS activities, if asked?

Are you interested in education, events for young people, etc?

Where do you want LAAS to be in 5 years? 10 years? and down the road?

Please e-mail or write us before 15 January with your ideas.

e-mail: Survey@LAAudubon.org

or write: Dexter Kelly
 LAAS Committee Chair
 22518 Burbank Blvd.
 Woodland Hills, CA 91367

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday, January 8, 2002

The Parrots of Southern California

Karen T. Maab

Karen joined the California Parrot Project in 1995 and is now a graduate student at Cal State Pomona. Learn how to identify Red-crowned Parrot (recently added to the California Bird Checklist) as well as many other parrot species and where to find them in California. Karen and her fabulous slides are guaranteed to turn everyone into a parrot enthusiast by the end of the evening.

Meet at 7:30 P.M.

in

Plummer Park.

**Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694**

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.

**Meeting Raffle
Good luck!**

Tuesday, February 12, 2002

Tibet: The Roof of the World and Nepal

Guy Commeau

Guy will share his journeys to areas of Tibet and Nepal only rarely accessible to western ornithologists. During a one week visit, in 1999, Guy saw almost one third of the 853 species of birds recorded in the diverse habitats of Nepal. Come share his experiences in these remote and achingly beautiful countries.

F I E L D T R I P S

Saturday, January 5 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area in Baldwin Hills Clean-up. The park entrance is off La Cienega Blvd. between Rodeo Rd. and Stocker St. Volunteers can check in at the entrance kiosk to get directions on where to meet within the park. The \$3.00 parking fee will be waived.

Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, January 6 –

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

Saturday and Sunday,

January 12 and 13 –

Salton Sea.

Leader **Nick Freeman**. For Sandhill Cranes and White-faced Ibis, meet Nick at Cattle Call Park south of Brawley to depart at 3:30 P.M. Saturday. Take Hwy 111 south to Brawley, head W through town on Main Street, then continue S on Hwy 86 (First St.) to a fairly quick right on Cattle Call Drive, continuing straight to the bottom of the hill. Sunday morning, we will meet at Carl's Jr. at Main and First Streets in Brawley, leaving there at 7:00 A.M. A good trip for Canada, Snow and Ross' geese, Burrowing Owl, Gila Woodpecker, and Ground- and Inca doves. Yellow-footed Gulls are possible. Anticipate mud. Bring lunch, 'scopes, and warm clothes. Registration fee \$5 to LAAS or \$7 at the Sea. No limit.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

*DATED MATERIAL
Please Expedite*

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Glendale, CA
PERMIT NO. 276

continued on page 10