

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

New River Wetlands Project

by Bob Miller

Getting from point A to point B in the Imperial Valley, in a timely manner, can be most difficult for one afflicted with the birding bug. It's survey day for the Wetlands and I am headed for "the projects", a short drive of several miles from home, through a checkerboard of agricultural fields laid out in neat little squares defined by water and the engineering marvel of the canal system that is its breath of life. This is my backyard and it is feeding America. It also feeds an abundance of wildlife! American Kestrels about every third power pole, Western Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds in every direction. Burrowing Owls on the canal banks and...whoa – a beautiful Ferruginous Hawk just begging to be photographed, till a Red-tailed Hawk decided it looked better on that spot! Another mile down the road a field is being irrigated. Literally thousands of birds carpet the field in black, gray, and white. Cattle Egrets, Ring-billed Gulls, White-faced Ibis, Greater Yellowlegs, Killdeer, blackbirds...! Living vacuum cleaners sucking up insects that are forced up by the advancing water.

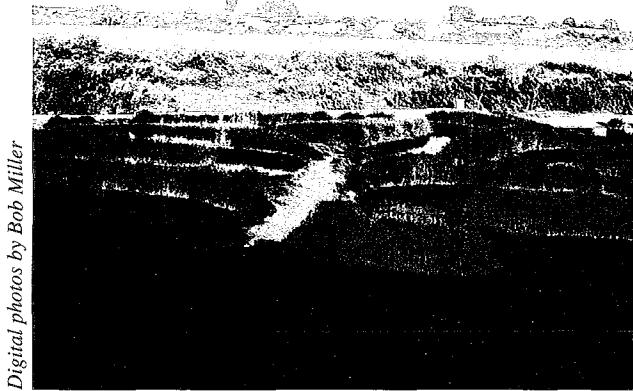
Oh yes...I am supposed to be going somewhere! I make the final turn along the Rice Drain and a massive chasm looms ahead (by Imperial Valley standards anyway) the New River channel, 70 feet deep

and 1800 feet across! The bottom of the New River channel is filled with mostly non-native invasive species such as tamarisk and phragmites, and provides little value to wildlife...but not at this spot. I always stop at this viewpoint to take it all in. Stretched out along the bottom of the little valley, from the base of the 70 foot bluff to the river's edge and trailing off as far as you can see to the east, is the New River Wetlands Project Imperial test site. One and a half miles of dark green native bulrushes and sedges bounding a twisting waterway. The number of birds visible, even from this vantage is the first thing that you notice. Using nature to help nature.

The New River has long been considered one of the most polluted waterways in the United States. Originating 20 miles south in Mexico, and flowing

through the Imperial Valley, it winds its way north about 67 river miles from the border to the Salton Sea. The river carries agricultural runoff, sewage and industrial runoff from both sides of the border. Most of the sewage and industrial runoff is treated. The New, Alamo, and Whitewater rivers are the lifeblood of the Salton Sea and as we continue to make improvements in water conservation, it is imperative that the quality of these waters be improved. The California Regional Water Quality Control Board developed a Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Basin Region and because the New River is an international body of water, the Mexican-American Water Treaty also governs it. Proposed regulations will set total maximum daily loads (TMDL) for silt and nutrients that are allowable in agricultural runoff and in the rivers. Nutrient loads flowing in from these rivers are thought to be a major contributor to the worsening health of the Salton Sea ecosystem.

Flowing water cleans itself naturally, especially when it gets added air by flowing over rocks and through vegetation. The New River does not have those features and the only two natural "rapids" that I know of in the whole Imperial Valley are near the Imperial site where it flows over sandstone pushed up by earthquake activity. The New River actually has very little oxygen



Digital photos by Bob Miller

Overview of Brawley site



Sora

in it so it does not support much in the way of fish either.

Leon Lesicka, of Desert Wildlife Unlimited, currently heads The Citizen's Congressional Task Force on the New River. The task force was formed in 1997 with the help of Congressman Duncan Hunter, to improve the quality of the river's water and provide wildlife habitat. Working with the Imperial Irrigation District, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, International Boundary and Water Commission, Border Environment Cooperation Commission, and the Bureau of Reclamation, along with numerous other agencies, they have brought the pilot project well into its second year. Initial construction began in late spring of 2000 and vegetation was planted by mid summer and the bulrushes and sedges are maturing rapidly.

By placing the sites in the river bottom several goals are accomplished. (1) Water is being cleaned! (2) The land is being used, and the projects themselves, do not create negative impacts on wildlife or surrounding land use. (3) Quality wildlife habitat is being created. (4) With the exception of the smaller Brawley test site, the water is delivered to the sites and passes through them by gravity flow without the use of electricity or power. The smaller Brawley site currently uses one pump to bring the water up from the New River as part of the tests of how well these projects actually clean water. Future sites will be cleaning the water before it reaches the New River.

This new project is already adding tremendous habitat for wildlife as well as doing a remarkable job of cleaning the waters of the river through the use of nature itself. This initial pilot project is

slated to run for three years and consists of two sites. The Imperial site is 68 acres and one and a half miles long. It receives its water from the Rice Drain and is made up entirely of agricultural runoff. The Brawley site is seven acres in size and its water supply comes directly from the New River. The water first flows into the large settling ponds to settle out the heavier silts and from there flows into a series of smaller ponds planted with native bulrushes and sedges.

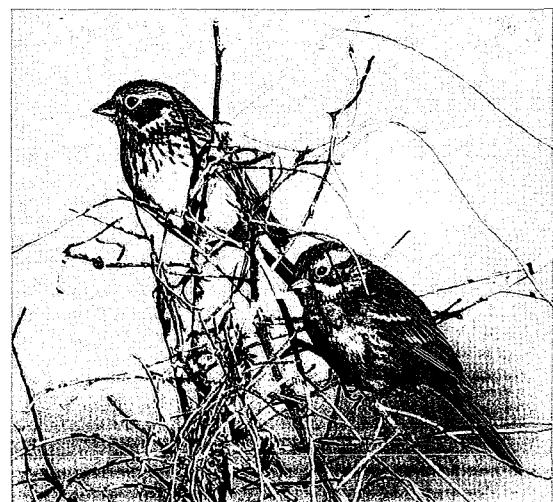
The vegetation and ponds are laid out so the water must wind its way in a zigzag pattern the length of the site. Initial testing of water in and out of the systems has shown a decrease of as much as 97% in total suspended solids and an increase of up to 83% in dissolved oxygen. If proven successful, the wetlands will be expanded to cover most of the river bottom areas of the New and Alamo rivers with about 37 new sites being considered already.

Henry Detwiler and I are conducting the avian and wildlife surveys for the project. We began our surveys in March of 2000, doing five visits to each site, per quarter. To date we have recorded just over 110 species and confirmed successful nesting of about 15 with numerous probable breeders. The large settling ponds attract grebes, herons, cormorants, gulls, terns, shorebirds, waterfowl, and pelicans. American Bittern has been recorded at the Brawley site and Least Bittern, Virginia Rail, and Sora at both sites. The Brawley site has a power line passing nearby and a date grove on top of the hill, which attracts kingfishers, kingbirds, accipiters and the like. Great Horned Owl and Barn Owl share the date grove, cautiously on the latter's part of course! Swainson's Hawks have been observed on several occasions and, just recently, two Zone-tailed Hawks have been seen near the site. The Imperial site has little in the way of trees but the few pockets of mesquite along the hillside can be loaded with warblers, sparrows, towhees, etc. A lone, large sentinel of a eucalyptus tree stands watch over the site and is favored by wintering Red-tailed Hawks. Feisty Marsh

Wrens and Common Yellowthroats pretty much own the bulrushes but share them with Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped warblers in big numbers during the winter. The Imperial site has become the most likely place in the Imperial Valley to actually SEE a Least Bittern, Sora, or Virginia Rail. If you ever wanted to sharpen your skills at birding by ear, this site is about as good as it gets for deciphering the sounds of a marsh, or adding to your confusion! Yellow-headed and Red-winged blackbirds nest in big numbers. Cattle, Snowy, and Great egrets line the shore with occasional flocks of White-faced Ibis settling in for a midday break. Although they have not been using the wetlands directly, Prairie and Peregrine falcons have been seen near the Imperial site recently and the fields just to the south of Wienert usually hold some of the highest concentrations of wintering Mountain Plover in the Imperial Valley.

These sites will prove to be a regular stop on any birding trip to the Salton Sea and the Imperial Valley. Damsels and dragons (flies of course), nine species and counting! Raccoons and coyotes, though seldom seen, leave sign of their nightly prowlings. Bullfrogs, although not the most favored guests, have found the wetlands quite favorable as has the Woodhouse Toad. Bobcats are not unheard of in the river bottoms throughout the valley and I expect they will be taking up residence near the sites as well.

The Imperial site is located west of Forrester Road and on the south bank of the New River. The Imperial Valley is



Vesper and Brewer's sparrows on site

about a three and a half-hour drive from the Los Angeles area, – make that eight hours for you seriously afflicted birders! Take Interstate 10 east and then the expressway to Hwy 86 south near Indio. At the stop sign in the city of Westmorland you will turn right (south), on Forrester Road. Go south on Forrester Road till you pass through the New River channel and turn right onto Wienert Road, which will be the first road on your right as you come up out of the channel. At about two miles along on Wienert, a large deep drain canal will join you on the left, this is the Rice Drain and it supplies the project. A little further along and the Rice Drain passes under Wienert and heads northwest to your right. Turn right on the first bank, there is a small sign hanging from a chain that says "Granite". Follow the drain down into the site. From the San Diego area you would go north on Forrester Road from I-8. You will go past Worthington Road and turn left onto Wienert Road.

To reach the Brawley site from the Imperial site, take Wienert back to Forrester and go north. Turn east on Keystone Road, which only goes to the right. Keystone runs into Hwy 86 and you will go north on 86 toward Brawley. Go west (left) on Legion Road, which is the first signal light a mile south of Brawley. Follow Legion Road to the end of the pavement and continue along the chain link fence on your left. You will pass through an open gate and will come to an orange painted standpipe. The road down into the wetlands is immediately on your right. You can get an overlook of the site if you continue to the date grove. The Imperial Valley is pretty much laid out in big squares so if you miss your turn do not panic, go to the next corner and make your way back easily enough.

If you run into a cowboy with a pair of binoculars glued to his face...stop and say hi...I would love to meet you! See ya at the sea.... 

Bob Miller is a native of, and a bird guide in, the Imperial Valley. In cahoots with Henry Detwiler of Yuma, AZ. Bruce Aird, and Vic Liepzig of Orange County, CA. They are SouthWest Birders and can be reached at www.southwestbirders.com

LAAS CO-SPONSORS THE WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS MEETING IN ORANGE COUNTY OCTOBER 2002

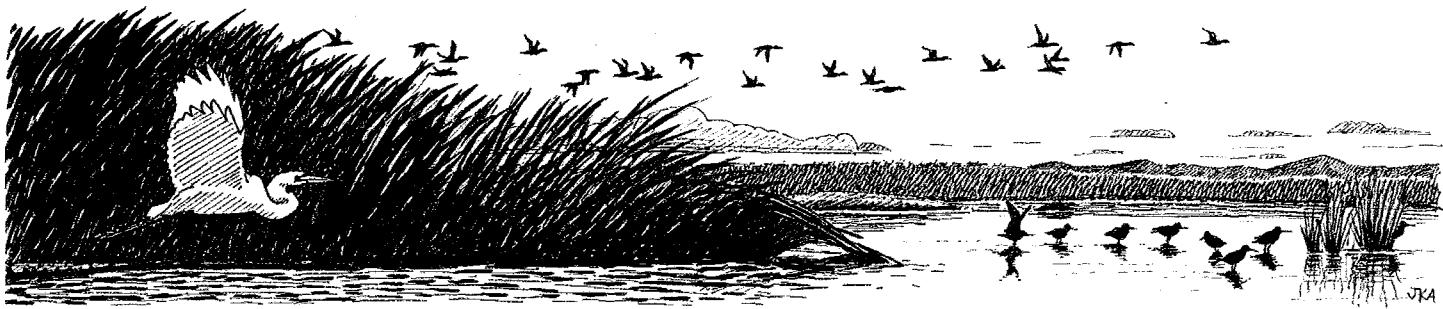
Sea and Sage Audubon Society will host, and Los Angeles Audubon Society will co-sponsor, the 27th annual meeting of the Western Field Ornithologists October 10-13, 2002 at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary and Country Inn by Ayres in Costa Mesa. WFO uses the proceeds from their annual meeting and associated activities to publish *Western Birds*, a journal devoted to field ornithology in and around western North America. Those attending the meeting will learn about up-to-date field research and meet some of the best-known ornithologists in the west. They will also have the opportunity to participate in field trips led by Western Field Ornithologists and our local experts to locations that many of us normally have no access to. Two pelagic trips are in the works for WFO 2002, as are two post-meeting birding trips: a three-day trip (led by Jon Dunn and Guy McCaskie) to the Salton Sea and another for migrants in northwestern Baja California.

Wildlife artist and field biologist John Schmitt will lead an indoor field trip on bird topography and there will be two workshops on documenting bird sightings. The mornings of the meeting will be devoted to field trips, the afternoons to scientific presentations and expert panels on sight and sound identification. Social activities and field trips are planned each evening; LAAS is sponsoring a Saturday evening barbecue at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary's Duck Club.

Our chapter is also bringing Robert Pitman in as the featured banquet speaker. Bob has just returned from his usual winter "haunt" – a U.S. research vessel plying the southeastern Pacific and Antarctic during the austral summer. He will be speaking on "The Pelagic Frontier". He is a wonderful speaker and a leading expert on pelagic birds, marine mammals, and sea turtles.

Meeting registration, events, and field trips are discounted for Western Field Ornithologists members. The prices have not been set for the birding trips to Salton Sea and Baja. For WFO membership information, contact www.wfo-cbrc.org

Go to www.seaandsageaudubon.org for updated meeting information (also linked through the WFO web site) or Catherine Waters (562) 869-6718 or robcawaters@earthlink.net with any questions, suggestions, or offers to help.



CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

COLD COMFORT FOR GRAY WHALES: Gray whales were taken off the Endangered Species List in 1994 but all is not well quite yet. Biologists have noted that only 260 calves in a recent estimate accompanied 26,000 adults. In a normal year the figures have been 1,100 to 1,400. The last three winters have been unusually cold in Alaska and scientists believe that the ice hasn't thawed in feeding areas at the proper time and may be an important factor in the low birthrate. Where's global warming when "our" whales need it?

DO YOUR JOB – GET CLOBBERED: The BLM manager of the California Desert Conservation Area (11.5 million acres) settled a lawsuit by prestigious environmental groups that would protect endangered tortoises and bighorn sheep. Responding to complaints by ranchers and off-road vehicle advocates, the Administration whisked the manager off to a desk job in Washington. The groups called this move an indication of an "emerging trend by the Bush Administration to get rid of public land officials who bring balance to land management decisions."

MAHOGANY LOGGERS, BEWARE! Mahogany is widely considered the finest cabinet wood in the world – that makes it desirable and expensive. Last year Brazil banned cutting the trees that were disappearing with alarming speed. Soon after the prohibition, illegal logging and smuggling of mahogany intensified and Brazil called out the police and the army to discourage it. Reuters news agency quotes environmentalists' "fear that at current logging rates, Brazil's Amazon reserves could disappear in eight years" doing irreparable harm to

tropical forests "that are home to up to 50% of the planet's plant and animal life."

KEEP THE CHANNEL ISLANDS WILD: Too many of us take the Channel Islands for granted. We can see them on a clear day from PCH; we see them up close on our pelagic trips and go ashore on Santa Cruz Island to look for the Island Scrub-Jay. Few of us know that it is a U.N. Biosphere Reserve, a designation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas of the earth that must be preserved for all humanity. Although the northern islands are a national park within a marine sanctuary, the waters are overfished to the point where a number of species are severely declining. Oil extraction takes place on the border of the sanctuary. Led by the Natural Resources Defense Council, environmentalists have proposed an underwater wilderness that would forbid oil drilling, dredging, dumping, and all fishing in the sanctuary. The California Fish and Game Commission has come forward with a plan to preserve 400 square miles of the Marine Sanctuary and is expected to vote on it soon. Some fishermen are opposing the plan and NRDC is asking for wide public support. Please call Governor Davis at (916) 445-2841 or fax at (916) 445-4633 or e-mail at graydavis@governor.ca.gov Ask him to support Fish and Game's plan.

BAN FENTHION:

Fenthion is a chemical pesticide used in Florida to kill mosquitoes and is quite effective. But it's also effective in killing birds, fish, invertebrates, and amphibians. The American Bird Conservancy is leading the charge to eliminate this horrendous killer. It is asking the help of all of us to tell the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency we want them to refuse to renew the manufacturer's registration of Fenthion. This poison is sprayed by helicopter over vast areas, including residential neighborhoods, and is harmful to humans. ABC has made our action here as easy as pie. Anyone can go to www.banfenthion.org and send an excellent message, in their name, to the EPA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Florida Mosquito Control Districts and Governor Jeb Bush of Florida. Help!

SEPULVEDA WETLANDS PARK: The Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in the Sepulveda Basin treats waste water from most of the San Fernando Valley. The solid wastes from homes, businesses, and sewers are sent down to the Hyperion plant on the coast where they are processed. Tillman treats the liquid waste to a high degree of purity (tertiary treatment) and releases it to Lake Balboa, the Wildlife Lake, and Haskell Creek from which the water passes into the Los Angeles River. The powers that be – the EPA and the Regional Water Quality Control Board – have determined that there are excessive nitrates in the river. Nitrates are nitrogen compounds that stimulate the growth of algae. Algae consume dissolved oxygen in the water that is essential for fish and invertebrates.

To reduce this nitrate pollution the city Sanitation Department is planning to build a 50 to 75 acre wetland in the basin that will use water-loving plants to take in nitrates for their normal metabolism. Together with improvements in nitrogen-removal technology in the Tillman plant, the new standards for nitrogen will be achieved. There are over 400 water treatment plants in this country where this "constructed wetland" idea is working

successfully. The new wetland will create new habitat for birds to further enrich the wildlife capacity of the basin. There may be shallow areas that might attract shorebirds that are rarely found in the Wildlife Lake nearby. A boardwalk through the marsh will enable the public to have a closer look at the birds.

Some homeowners groups have objected to the wetland, claiming that "sewer odors" and mosquito invasion will make their life miserable. However the Wildlife Lake, Lake Balboa, and Haskell Creek have received Tillman effluent for over ten years without complaints of overpowering odors or mosquitoes. All of these water bodies have water flowing into the river as will the wetland. The charge of a stagnant, smelly swamp is unacceptable. And mosquito fish work very well in the Wildlife Lake.

The Board of Directors of L.A. Audubon voted unanimously to support the wetland. 

BOOKSTORE NEWS

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SPECIAL PRE-INVENTORY OPTICS SALE

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	Retail	LAAS Price
10x40	\$1,200.00	\$880.00
10x56	\$1,549.00	\$1,110.00
8x40	\$1,179.00	\$860.00
8x56	\$1,449.00	\$1,020.00

Limited to stock on hand

Banded Birds

Leg, neck, or wing, you probably have seen marked birds and wondered why. Of course, it is some kind of research, but do you know: how to find out more? that your observation is important? how to report the sighting and what to report? Here is what LAAS member Bob Pann did and look what he learned.

To: bandreports@patuxent.usgs.gov

I identified two Canada Geese with yellow neckbands: TC15 and TA47, on Monday, 31 Dec 2001 between 10-11 am at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve., Los Angeles, CA. They were in a flock of some 500 Canadas, one White-fronted, and one Snow Goose.

This was my second sighting of TC15 and TA47, the first being on Dec 8, 2001, at about the same time and same location. That first report I sent via snail mail to the Dept. of the Interior, Bird Banding, MD, not knowing of any e-mail addresses at the time.

I would very much appreciate a report on the history of these two critters.

Robert W. Pann

To: Robert W. Pann

Recently we received a report from the Bird Banding Lab concerning your sightings of neck-collared Canada geese (yellow collars with black codes TA47 and TC15) near Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Preserve, Los Angeles, CA.

These birds were captured, leg banded and neck-collared on June 21, 2001 at Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management

Area. The 18,000 acre wetland is located on the east shore of the Great Salt Lake, 12 miles north of Salt Lake City, Utah and is one the State's top Canada goose production areas.

TA47 was a flightless young-of-the-year male while TC15 was a molting (flightless) adult male (at least 2 years of age and older) at time of banding.

Your reported sightings of these particular geese is the first we have received from outside of the Utah area.

These birds were necked-collared by Utah Division of Wildlife Resources personnel as part of a study to determine habitat preferences of Canada geese in an urban environment.

Thank you for your interest and effort in reporting sightings of these geese.

Sincerely,
Sam Manes, Wildlife Biologist

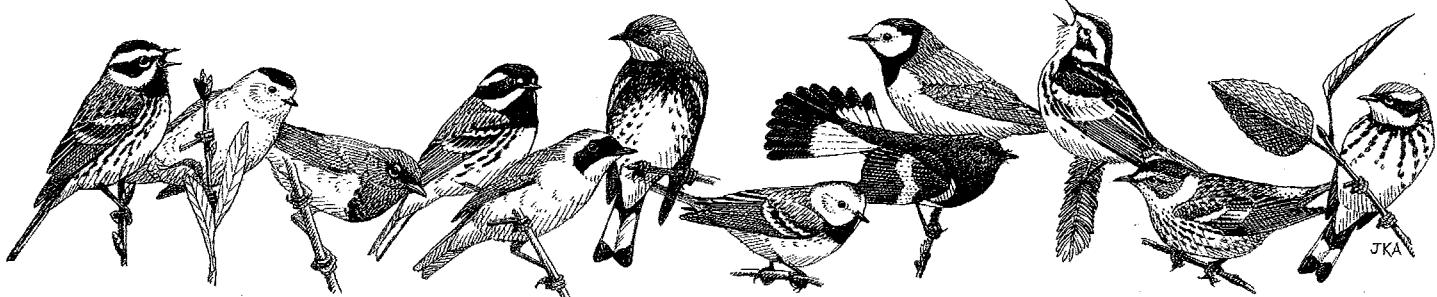
ADDRESSES TO REPORT BIRD BANDINGS:

1. WRITTEN:

USGS PATUXENT WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER
Bird Banding Lab
12100 Beech Forest Rd.
Laurel, MD 20708-4037

2. E-MAIL REPORTS: bandreports@patuxent.usgs.gov
3. TELEPHONE REPORTS: (800) 327 BAND (2263)

Reports should contain: 1. band number, 2. how found, 3. when found, 4. where found.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

Pelagic trips during late winter yielded several surprising records for southern California (e.g. Short-tailed Albatross), with the waters off Los Angeles producing a **Manx Shearwater** over Redondo Canyon on 23 February (Todd McGrath). This species, primarily an Atlantic Ocean denizen in U.S. territory, is very similar to the abundant Black-vented Shearwater, a Gulf of California breeder that ranges north up the Pacific Coast.

American White Pelicans lingered widely (where fish were available) from last fall's "invasion", with over 50 at Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area on 17 January (Tom Miko) and one still at Peck Pit Park in El Monte on 3 March (Dan Cooper). An **American Bittern**, a scarce winter visitant to the Los Angeles Basin (though historically much more common) graced the wildlife area at Sepulveda Basin in mid-January (m. ob.), and a **Least Bittern** was a rarity in cattails at Hansen Dam on 2 February (Kimball Garrett). A **White-faced Ibis**, now an uncommon migrant, spent February at Lake Balboa within the Sepulveda Basin (Jean Brandt).

Long-tailed Ducks (formerly "Oldsquaw") are detected in very small numbers most winters along the southern California coast, but up to six in of Long Beach Harbor (Kevin Larson, m. ob.) in early February was exceptional. Single **Black** and **White-winged scoters** were also present here, and Black Scoters were at Dockweiler Beach (Richard Barth) and at the mouth of Alamitos Bay (KL) on 27 January. These scoters are vastly outnumbered by the ubiquitous Surf Scoter, but are present most winters. **Hooded Mergansers** continue their increase, with birds wintering at *seven* locations in coastal Los Angeles Co. (RB).

Black Skimmer was once a rarity, but recently-established nesting colonies in California (north sparingly to south San Francisco Bay) produce increasing numbers along our coast in fall and winter – an impressive 540 were counted roosting on the beach in Long Beach (vic. Belmont Pier) on 27 January (KL). Shoreline sightings of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** continue, with four at Dockweiler State Beach on 26 February (RB).

Interesting raptor records included a fly-over immature **Northern Goshawk** reported over Torrance on 31 January

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

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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

(Mitch Heindel). Far more often reported than actually seen, this species may be told, with care, from large Cooper's Hawks by differences in body/wing proportion, speed of wing beat, and pattern of streaking on the undersides. Northbound migrant **Swainson's Hawks** were observed in two areas on 2 March: seven over Eagle Rock (DC) and one over Walnut (Mike San Miguel). This species moves through our area early, often on the first warm mornings of late winter and spring.

One of our most imperiled species, **Mountain Plover**, maintains a major wintering population in agricultural portions of the Antelope Valley – around 300 birds were in two areas of alfalfa fields east of Lancaster in early February, habitat they shared with smaller numbers of wintering **Long-billed Curlews**, another declining species (m. ob.). Nearly the entire global population of Mountain Plover is thought to winter in the Imperial Valley south of the Salton Sea. **Burrowing Owls** are also making their last stand in Los Angeles County in the Antelope Valley, with a single in a burrow along 50th St. East on 2 February (Mary Semski, Barbara Courtois). This also seems to be a major wintering location for **Tricolored Blackbird** in the county – 2000 were along 60th St. East on 9 February, and 1500 were along the California Aqueduct far west of here near Neenach on 5 February (DC). Even larger numbers have been tallied recently in large blackbird roosts within the basin (e.g. Whittier Narrows), which likely represent birds that bred in the Central Valley and are dispersing south for the winter.

Another species confined to the Palmdale-Lancaster area in the county is **Inca Dove**, a tiny, mainly Mexican species thought to have colonized the community of Lake Los Angeles during

a brief period in the mid-1990s. Though this population has apparently died out, the discovery of several birds at a pet store in nearby Littlerock (Nick and Mary Freeman) has put their origin into question – are they, like the parrots, simply another result of people releasing unwanted cage birds?

Several interesting woodpeckers were found this season, with the most popular being a **Lewis's** that staked out a telephone pole from late February on in residential Sierra Madre (m. ob.). Another Lewis's Woodpecker wintered along Sycamore Canyon in the Whittier Hills from 2 February (Jeff Webster, Larry Schmahl), which was possibly the same bird reported from Rose Hills Cemetery in December (AL). This beautiful canyon, off Workman Mill Rd., is one of the gems of the Puente-Chino Hills and is now protected by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. A **Williamson's Sapsucker**, which probably winters very sparsely in our local mountains, was at Charlton Flat on 28 January (KG), and a "Yellow-shafted" **Northern Flicker** was at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area on 17 February (Lori Conrad).

Rare flycatchers continuing from last season were the **Greater Pewee** at Pomona Cemetery (to 19 January, Edward Stanton), the **Thick-billed Kingbird** at Cal Poly Pomona (to 17 February, Wes Sircable), the **Tropical Kingbird** at Malibu Lagoon (to 11 March, TM) and the **Eastern Phoebe** at Sepulveda Basin (to 17 February, LC). All of these birds may be staying longer – these are just the last dates reported as of mid-March.

A pair of **Say's Phoebe**s acting as if interested in breeding was near unused sheds in the Legg Lake maintenance yard

on 12 March (DC). Though this would be the first nesting record for this well-worked locale (fide Michael Long), the species is undergoing a major increase in its nesting range in southern California. At least two each of **Plumbeous** and **Cassin's vireo** wintered in the basin (RB, KL, KG), with apparently early migrant Cassin's found in the western Santa Monica Mtns. on 24 February (Irwin Woldman), Chino Hills on 2 March (Cin-Ty Lee), and in El Segundo on 6 March (Barbara Johnson). Two early **Warbling Vireos** were reported from the western Santa Monica Mountains, on the exceptionally early date of 24 February (IW).

As noted in the previous *Birds of the Season*, irruptive winter visitants (finches, nuthatches) were scarce, and two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** at Hollywood Reservoir and one in Manhattan Beach were the only ones noted by RB during January and February. **Purple Finches** were also nearly absent from the L.A. Basin, except for a handful of birds in Griffith Park in late February and early March (RB, DC). Another montane invader, **Pine Siskins** was represented only by a flock of 30 at Buckhorn Campground in the San Gabriel Mountains on 28 January (KG).

Varied Thrushes continue to turn up in shady spots in our hills and mountains into late winter, with one in Sylmar's Wilson Canyon on 26 January (Steve Sosenky), two at middle elevations in the San Gabriel Mtns. on 28 January (KG), one in Topanga Canyon State Park on 20 February (RB), and one in Placerita Canyon on 12 March (Jan Swift). One of the most exciting finds of the season was an apparently returning (from last spring)

Brown Thrasher at Eaton Canyon Nature Center in Pasadena found on 2 March (Jon Feenstra). The Bonelli Park **Harris' Sparrow** was last reported on 18 February (Andrew Lee). **White-throated Sparrows** turned up in Topanga Canyon State Park (RB) and near the Brown Thrasher at Eaton Canyon (JF). The two "Large-billed" **Savannah Sparrows** at the Ballona Creek breakwater were present to 18 February and a "Red" **Fox Sparrow** (another rare, distinctive subspecies) wintered at Kenneth Hahn Recreation Area near Culver City (to 14 February, both RB). Two other rare sparrows included a well-described **Clay-colored Sparrow** at Peck Pit Park on 3 March (AL) and a **Green-tailed Towhee** at Hahn Rec. Area on 28 January, which may have been an early migrant (RB).

Vagrant wintering neotropical migrants were few, with the **Chestnut-sided Warbler** continuing along the Los Angeles River in Atwater Village to the end of the period, one of the two **Palm Warblers** from the winter still at Peck Pit Park in El Monte on 3 March (DC), and a **Pine Warbler** still at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on 16 February (Larry and Matthew Schmahl). A **Summer Tanager** wintered at Recreation Park in El Segundo and a **Baltimore Oriole** was in Culver City on 18 January (both RB). Another bird utilizing our winter-flowering plantings, a lone female **Costa's Hummingbird** was in residential Temple City on 3 March (DC). Apparently displaced by the abundant Anna's Hummingbird, this species is rarely found on the floor of the Los Angeles Basin. 

LAAS PICNIC

SUNDAY, JUNE 23

SEE PAGE 11 FOR DETAILS

Birding California's East Coast – Blythe

by Roger Higson

You may have noticed a black dot labeled "Blythe" on the far right hand side of the southern Pacific Coast map in *North American Birds*. You may actually have paused here to get fuel and food, before rushing on to a good birding spot. I am willing to gamble that you never thought "what a neat place to live and bird!" Well, when I moved here in late summer 2000, I did not think so either.

After sulking for a couple of weeks, I grabbed my bins and went birding. After all, I could only sort my stamp collection so many times. My first neat bird was a Louisiana Waterthrush, which remained at a trailer park septic pond just north of Blythe for over a week. This bird, which I excitedly broadcast, taught me two valuable lessons. First, the Blythe community is exceedingly birder-friendly. Simply asking at the office for permission and saying you were looking for the bird granted you social value and unlimited access. Second, people who tear down a fence to get in can get rid of "friendly" real quick! Fortunately, that was a "fence" I was able to fix. The establishment realized that there are morons in all walks of life.

As we headed into our first winter here, I started to notice the raptors. As I drove to school, it seemed like every other pole or picket had a raptor on it. I had mind numbing views of Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie Falcons, and Merlins on a daily basis – sadly to the point where, this winter, I just nodded to them as I drove by.

Spring 2001 arrived, but checking every bush for vagrant warblers was an

exercise in futility. Although I had owned it for some time, I finally sat down and read *Birds of the Lower Colorado River* by Rosenberg et al from cover to cover. This splendid book sent me in the right direction. Look for the birds that should be here. Black Rails along the river were a tough one, but doable if you don't mind staying awake all night and crawling around in marshes. Elf Owls – I gave them my best shot from the Agnes Wilson Bridge down to McIntyre Park. None, and I'm still catching up on my sleep.

Spring closed out with one of those birds that makes you get up and go out the next day. I chased a pelagic up the Colorado River! Birding in McIntyre Park, an odd dark bird flew past me along the river. I set off in hot pursuit, north on the roads to hit the available access spots. I got splendid views of it before, and as, it soared over the diversion dam. A Sooty Shearwater!

Lucy's Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Yellow-breasted Chat, can be found with effort. Northern Cardinal is still found along the river, but you have to crank up the effort. Fun, with minimum effort, comes with filling up hummingbird feeders and dumping bird seed in your feeder. At one point, I was going through 50 lbs. of seed a day. (I have to rationalize the long term financial impact with the fun of having over 150 Yellow-headed Blackbirds on my fence. Birds win!)

Summer moved through with a Harris' Hawk along the river, and fall arrived again. Yes, waders come through here

too. Ruff, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Snowy Plover, Willet, and phalaropes appeared. The most enjoyable sight was that of 47 Common Snipe in a small flock in a field, with more peaking at me out of the alfalfa. Vermilion Flycatchers bred, other birds arrived and left. Eastern Kingbird, Gray Catbird, and flocks of Swainson's Hawks, passed through. A Blue-headed Vireo at my dog's water bowl made me realize that I should have fed our chickens earlier. No, let me rethink that – I would have missed it if I had!

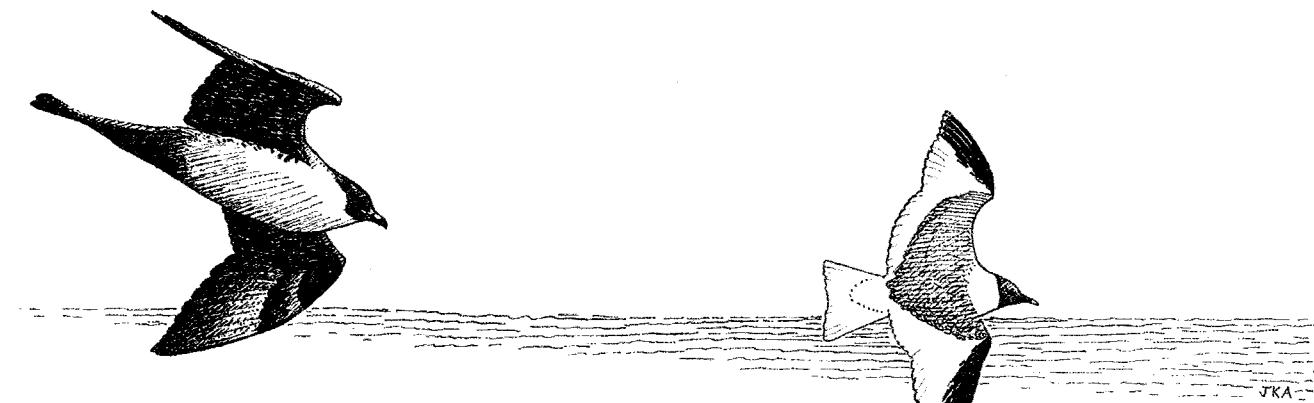
A Sabine's Gull wandered in the road, a titmouse refused to identify itself more accurately. A Sprague's Pipit and a potential Curve-billed Thrasher all appeared along the way.

The most fun falls into the red zone! Ruddy Ground-Doves showed up en masse, and then a Rufous-backed Robin visited the same yards. Then Reddish Egrets were found on the river behind the same yard. Zone-tailed Hawks were seen, Gilded Flickers were life birds for folks, and a lady from Florida spent more time looking at a Yellow-headed Blackbird than anything else! It was her 650th ABA bird, but she had seen "the Ross's Gull" the week before, her second. Oh well.

Blythe is a splendid place to bird, and I have had a lot of fun sharing this spot with visitors. The natives continue to remain friendly. Let us keep it that way. If you are out this way and you see a disheveled person with a small black terrier peering thoughtfully into some kind of thicket, please stop. It might just be me and my Dublin Terrier "Guinness", watching something neat.

PICNIC

SUNDAY JUNE 23
CHARLTON FLATS



PELAGIC TRIPS

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's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarities: puffins (twice in 15 years).

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

\$50 – tea and coffee, no galley.

Saturday, June 8 –

Santa Cruz Island – landing 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 Islands National Monument.

Twelve-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 6:00 A.M. on the R/V UCLA Seaworld. Birds seen on prior trips:

Northern Fulmar; 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. Expected birds: 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 Layson Albatross. Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kevin Larson, David Pereksta and Bernardo Alps.**

WESTERN TANAGER

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FIELD TRIPS

continued from page 12

Sunday, May 12 –

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, May 18 –

Santa Anita Canyon. **Mary Freeman** will lead. Take the 210 Fwy toward Arcadia, then take Santa Anita Ave. N to the parking lot at the very end of the road. Meet at the trailhead at the bottom of the lot. Four mile round-trip, moderately strenuous walk through oak and chaparral canyons. Good selection of breeding and migrating birds including warblers, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Band-tailed Pigeon, and American Dipper possible. Pack a lunch. Meet 7:30 A.M.

Saturday, May 18 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area in Baldwin Hills. Leader: **Richard Barth.** Trips covering landscaped parklands and natural coastal scrub habitats are designed for beginning birders and members of the community. The park entrance is off La Cienega Blvd. between Rodeo Rd. and Stocker St. After passing the entrance kiosk (\$3 parking fee), turn left (leading to the "Olympic Forest") and park in the first available spaces. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, May 19 –

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. 'scopes helpful. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, June 1 –

Evening trip along the Angeles Crest
Leader: **Ray Schep.** This trip meets at 5 P.M. and ends around midnight. Target birds are Great Horned, Northern Saw-whet, Flammulated, Western Screech, and Northern Pygmy owls plus Common

Poorwills. There is a good chance for hearing these birds but viewing them may prove difficult. Meet in La Cañada, just 1 block N of the 210 Fwy. Turn N on Hwy 2 and turn right on the first street. We will carpool to Wrightwood for pizza or snacks about 8:00 P.M. Be prepared for cold weather.

Sunday, June 2 –

Topanga State Park.
See May 5 for write up.

Sunday, June 9 –

Whittier Narrows.
See May 12 for write-up.

Saturday, June 15 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.
Leaders: **Eric and Ann Brooks.**
See May 18 for write up.

Sunday, June 16 –

Mt Pinos. Leader: **Ray Schep.**
Take I-5 N past Gorman to the Frazier Park offramp; turn W and follow Frazier Mountain Park Rd., bearing right onto Cuddy Valley Rd. Meet at the "Y" formed by the junction of Cuddy Valley Rd. and Mil Potrero Hwy, and park in the obvious dirt clearing. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Sunday, June 16 –

Ballona Wetlands.
See May 19 for write-up.

Saturday, June 22 –

Hansen Dam. Join **Kimball Garrett** for possible Bell's Vireo, chat and other riparian species. Take 405 N 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. Long walk, bring water! Meet at 7:00 A.M.

Sunday, June 23 –

LAAS Annual Picnic. See page 11.

Friday-Monday, June 28-July 1

Southern Sierras Weekend with Bob Barnes. Northern Goshawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pileated Woodpecker, and owls likely. 125-175 species seen each year. Participation limited. For information flyer, reserve with SASE. Fee: \$15 for each day attended (\$60 for four days). Reserve rooms early. Your name and phone number will be available to car-poolers, unless you request otherwise.

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.*

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 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.

LAAS ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, June 23 – Charlton Flat – Adventure Pass required

Meet at Charlton Flat (lower picnic area) off the Angeles Crest Highway, approximately a 40-minute drive up Angeles Crest from the Foothill (210) Freeway in La Cañada/Flintridge.

8:00 A.M.	Early Bird walk led by Kimball Garrett
10:00 A.M.	Butterfly and Plant walk led by Fred Heath
11:00 A.M.	Beginning birder's walk led by Jean Brandt
12:00 (Noon)	Picnic

Bring a lunch, LAAS will supply the cold drinks.

Everyone – kids, grandparents, friends, etc. – are all invited.

After a hiatus of seven years, LAAS is once again having a picnic! Join us for a fun-filled day of birds, butterflies, plants, food, and friends. We may even get in a little baseball.

LAAS INTERNATIONAL TOURS

South Africa – October 21 – November 7, 2002
Namibia Extension: November 4 – 17, 2002

See South Africa in spring, with numerous birds in stunning plumage and unforgettable views of wildlife. Travel along the West Coast from Table Mountain to the Little Karoo, home of the largest number of endemic birds in South Africa, then east to Mkuze, the Hluhluwe River, the Greater St. Lucia Wetlands, Ndumo, and the grand finale: Timbavati Nature Reserve, adjoining Kruger National Park.

Experience Namibia, from lush game parks such as Etosha National Park to arid landscapes of the legendary Skeleton Coast, where the desert meets the Atlantic Ocean, and observe bird species and other wildlife found nowhere else.

Planning is underway for 2003, with probable destinations to the AMAZON RIVER, one of the greatest voyages in natural history, and BOTSWANA and VICTORIA FALLS, a magnificent land of untamed beauty. Look for further announcements shortly.

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

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday, May 14, 2002

Australia Walkabout

Herbert Clarke

From Sydney to the Atherton Tablelands, from Kakadu National Park to Brisbane...so much to see; birds, animals, wonderful scenery, and interesting people. Will he show the Welcome Swallow, the Superb Lyrebird, the Macleay's Honeyeater or the Red-legged Pademelon? The Long-tailed Finch or the Satin and Regent bower birds? So many birds, so little time.

Come enjoy the splendid photography of Herb Clarke, and relive his experiences on the September 2001 LAAS tour of this unique down-under country, Australia.

Tuesday, June 11, 2002

Swift Trips Around the World

Dr. Charles Collins

Dr. Charles Collins of California State University at Long Beach will present an update on his research and field observations of this fascinating family. Dr. Collins' research has included swifts from the Philippines and South Africa to Venezuela and southern California.

F I E L D T R I P S

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

Saturday, May 4 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area

Cleanup. Check in at the parking kiosk about 8:00 A.M. The attendant will give you directions to the current project and the \$3.00 parking fee will be waived. The park entrance is off La Cienega Blvd. between Rodeo Rd. and Stocker St.

Sunday, May 5 –

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, May 11 –

Malibu Creek State Park Leader:
Roger Cobb. Take 101 Fwy west to Las Virgenes Rd. Take Las Virgenes Rd. 3 miles S to the park entrance on your right. Meet in the upper parking lot near the restrooms at 8:30 A.M. There is a \$3.00 parking fee or use your annual State Park pass.

Sunday, May 12 –

California City and Galileo Hills.
Leader: Nick Freeman. Take Hwy 14 past Mojave, continue N on Hwy 14 about 10 miles, then turn right on California City Blvd. Drive through town about a mile past the shops and turn left on 20 Mule Team Rd. just past the Central Park Golf Course. At the end of the old pavement turn left before the hill, take your first right, your first right again, into the Silver Saddle Country Club, followed by two lefts into the lot. Park by the pond. About 2 hrs driving time from L.A. LAAS phone sign-up mandatory. 12 max. Bring lunch, sun block. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

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Meeting Raffle

To increase your chances of winning, visit the LAAS Bookstore and Headquarters either on meeting day or the Saturday immediately preceding the monthly meeting and receive an extra raffle ticket to submit at the meeting.

Good luck!

continued on page 10