

WESTERN TANAGER



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Los Angeles Audubon Society

Death Valley Memorial Weekend, 1976

By Terry Clark

When Hank Brodtkin called Death Valley for reservations, a weary voice at the other end apologized, "You know that the golf course has been closed?" "It has?" Hank exclaimed, "Hey, that's terrific!" To the woman at Furnace Creek Inn, the comment seemed a bit bizarre. But how was she to know that Hank Brodtkin was one of 30 or so "birders" racing to Death Valley over the Memorial Day weekend to glean the golf course for vagrant spring migrants?

While most Californians would be enjoying the convenience of patio pleasures, a small band of hard-core birdwatchers would submit to the scorch of the sun and dust of the desert, just to catch a glimpse of some lost eastern species. Last year a Common Grackle had turned up – first state record for the bird, whose range does not extend west of the Rockies. This year . . . good God, what if it's a Swainson's Warbler or a Short-billed Marsh Wren!

Birding is fast becoming a popular pastime. It seems only natural that it should, given today's no-preservatives, no-artificial-flavors consciousness. Only a few years ago, purchasing binoculars was potentially embarrassing. Mumbling something about "the racetrack" helped side-step suspicions that the buyer was a peeping pervert, or even worse, a birdwatcher.

But now binoculars are proudly worn as a badge of higher awareness and sensitivity to the environment.

Numbers soar as more and more birdwatchers come out of the closet: from former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, who, it had been rumored, commandeered government helicopters for birding trips, to Hugh Hefner, who subscribes to the L.A. Audubon Society's monthly birding tip sheet, *Western Tanager*.

Remember when John Mitchell promised to root out Communists, even if it meant round up every last birdwatcher in the country? Today Mitchell would find the task overwhelming even if he didn't

have other pressing issues to address, for some 400,000 Americans belong to various Audubon societies scattered across the States. 35,000 members live in California. It's here, in this sunny garden of germinal obsessions, that you find the highest number of the hardcore.

Birders are hopelessly obsessed. Jon Dunn was about to leave for class at San Diego State when he received a call about the Yellow-throated Vireo in Morongo Valley. Donna Dittmann canceled a date and hopped a plane as soon as she heard of the Bar-tailed Godwit in L.A. When the Luthers got wind of a Cassin's Sparrow seen in San Diego, they couldn't get out of Berkeley fast enough. With their small son asleep in the back seat, John and Suzanne spent the night speeding down Interstate 5, just to add a bird to their state lists.

A list is something every birder keeps. The life list, for instance, is a tally of all the different species an individual has seen in his lifetime. It measures the fulfillment of one's obsession, but it also serves as a game, a way of feeding the obsession more. Seeing a Cassin's Sparrow a thousand miles out of range is one thing, but how can a birder get turned on by the sight of a "trash bird" like the California Gull year after year? And yet this bird does get the juices flowing if it's "needed" for a yard list or county



Terry and Barry Clark



Guy McCaskie

list or from-the-car list. There's more than just one game in town.

The person responsible for spreading the state-listing fever is Guy McCaskie. Since 1957, when he came to San Diego, McCaskie has poured his energy into the pursuit of California birds. He got hooked back in his homeland, Scotland, and has spent some 35 years peering through binoculars. Over the past 19 years, Guy has fathered a brand new breed of California birder, to whom he has passed on two diagnostic traits: inexhaustible energy and expertise. As a matter of fact, it was Guy who pioneered Death Valley as a hot spot for migrants. Today, McCaskie remains the undisputed guru of the California birding cult, though his critics wonder if they don't detect a greater similarity to Timothy Leary than to Krishnamurti. At some point, they reason, enthusiasm spills into the realm of the insane.

Take the Death Valley spring ritual, for instance. Though the highlights of migration seem to peak around Memorial Day, the desert pilgrimage starts the weekend before. This year a handful of impassioned birders decided that it might be fun to stay the whole ten days. Most of them were college students, some of whom still had to face term papers and exams. Like Bedouins, these young Californians caravaned the singeing desert in their vans and compacts, an ironic combination of the car culture and the nature movement.

But why Death Valley, of all places? To bird and birders, it's an ideal setting in more ways than one. Lost migrants, exhausted by the desolate expanse of the Colorado and Mojave Deserts, fly over

Death Valley and spot tiny islands of bright green: resting places providing food and water. To birders, these oases serve as migrant traps. Thus the birding route evolved, the long haul connecting green dot to the next green dot: Furnace Creek, Stovepipe Wells, Scotty's Castle and, two hours north, Oasis, then Deep Springs. This 140 mile circuit isn't easy, but the birders face it every day, because the only way to know what specialties arrived during the night is to go and see.

Birding may seem excessive, but once the fever hits, everything else follows. Pushing beyond fatigue, driving across miles of monotony, suffering the heat, avoiding responsibilities back home, all these add to a sense of high adventure. And catharsis is tied to ordeal.



Jon Dunn

Birding used to be dismissed as a quaint diversion of little old ladies in tennis shoes. But new descriptions are in order. Don Roberson, a Bay area birder who manages to study law, feels California birders fall into two basic categories: there's the let's go look at birds this afternoon if the weather's nice and the let's drive to San Diego and hit Death Valley on the way back. In 1975, Don put 40,000 miles on his car, trying for 400 state birds in one year. To some he's a hero, to others a fool. The two groups simply can't understand each other. Sometimes hostilities arise, like during the Memorial Day weekend.

By some quirk of fate, two gentle souls who like to look at birds find themselves thrown into the midst of the "serious" birders. At

first the couple tries to be tolerant, but the whole thing feels uncomfortable from the very start. Saturday morning, for instance: with the first chirp, well, it must have been around 4:45 A.M., everyone got up. Got up and drove off! One minute there were bodies stuffed in sleeping bags scattered everywhere, the next minute there was just a trail of dust leading to the road. How could anyone not take time to enjoy the serenity and scenery of Cottonwood Canyon? Or brush their teeth? Or make a cup of nice hot coffee? Are these folks insane?

During the course of the day, as the cavalcade birds its way to the inferno below, the genteel couple gathers evidence to confirm their quickly formed suspicions. Yes indeed, these folks are nuts. And they shouldn't be emulated, Guy McCaskie least of all. This isn't birdwatching, it's anarchy. Where's the quiet communion with Nature, the humility, the reverence? Instead, these fanatics are tearing across the desert, climbing over barbed wire fences, circling people's homes, running through the mesquite, charging past befuddled tourists at Scotty's Castle, trampling all over the Furnace Creek golf course, checking out one too many sewage ponds, and, here's the clincher, the part that's incomprehensible, they plan to do it all again the next day, only in reverse!

The out-of-step couple, buffering frustration with moral indignation and self-righteousness, decides they've had their fill. Don't tell them that this has any merit! They're birdwatchers too, but this hit-and-run behavior is simply scandalous; nobody takes time to really study birds, nor do they give a damn if anyone else has had a chance to see a species. So



Donna Dittmann

the outraged couple seethes back to L.A., probably discussing the virtues of their higher sensibility, certainly not discussing the vitality of Kerouac's *On The Road*.

But the couple's right, it's totally insane. Even the birders admit that. If you ask Olga Clarke why she, her husband Herb, and Arnold Small, left L.A. for Furnace Creek at 10:30 Friday night and started birding as soon as they arrived at sun-up, she'll tell you it's because they're cuckoo. (That morning, however, they got the first spring record of a Prairie Warbler, and Arnold Small can tell you that a Prairie Warbler is one thing you don't see while walking your dog in Beverly Hills).

Of course these older birders aren't quite as crazy as the kids. Last year, when temperatures rose above 115 degrees, Olga refrained from birding topless, though some of that group from San Francisco . . . well! And at night, while the kids party on the golf course because someone has some stuff, the older birders have the sense to stay in their air-conditioned motel rooms, sipping cocktails just like normal folks.

The first few hours of the morning are of primary importance because that's the period of greatest bird activity. If you want to brush your teeth at 9 o'clock, suit yourself . . . spend the rest of the late morning drinking coffee. But if you've come to bird, you move your ass as soon as there's a hint of light.

As for careful observation and study, that's part of a birder's past. Being able to identify an Evening Grosbeak by its call doesn't happen overnight. A knowledge of ranges, habits, habitats, arrival and departure dates, flight patterns, and nesting needs are all part of the exper-



Louis Bevier

tise. Once a birder has learned the finer points (Jon Dunn started at the age of 10, Van Remsen was 6), then he moves on to a new kind of game. He starts chasing the rare ones – ones that show up where they shouldn't be. The score sheet becomes a year list, and you try to break 400, please God, just once!

Birding is the sport of pigeonholing and it's so . . . well, natural, organic. Like granola and herbal shampoo. On another level, there's a bit of the old Firebird myth: capturing elusiveness, dominating chance, ordering disorder. "I know, therefore I see. I see, therefore I am." Rousseau would have loved it.

Weird, you say? But is it? Think of urban anonymity. Every individual can't be among the best – whether birder or folk dancer or coin collector – but he can be part of a relatively small, definable



Kimball Garrett

group. Instant identity once you join the club; excel and you're a star. Better a star to a few than a nobody to all.

Many of the Californians assembled at Death Valley are among the very best birders in the country, make no mistake about it. At 70 mph they can look up at a speck in the sky and call out "Swainson's Hawk!" If you ask them how they know, they'll ask you what else it could be with slender wings extended at that angle. They identify a concealed MacGillivray's Warbler, all 4 ft" inches of it, by its chip. If the bill looks somewhat longer, you've got yourself a female Cassin's, not a Purple Finch. The Painted Redstart's Latin name? Well, it used to be *Setophaga picta* until the bird was dumped into the genus *Myioborus*.

It's easy enough to become a bird-watcher, but if you gravitate toward



Paul Lehman and Richard Webster

inner sanctums, be prepared to make some sacrifices. Expertise always demands time, and when you're spending most of your time in the field, there are matters to which you can't properly attend like a career or a girlfriend or a family. Herb and Olga Clarke met while preparing for a future in biology, but they became full-fledged birders, taking jobs just long enough to pay for the next big trip this year, Madagascar. Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin have decided to forego the demands and distractions of raising a family. John and Suzanne Luther, on the other hand, have taken Davey birding since he was 6 months old. At 2 fi, while most children are going through an anal phase, Davy's going through an owl phase. He can identify every bird that frequents the backyard. But Suzanne keeps her fingers crossed, hoping that her son will not rebel and take up dune buggies or hunting.

Louis Bevier worries about the fact that his only friends are birders. He's already found it necessary to give up water polo, and he's got someone that he cares for, but she just isn't interested in birds. Then there's the hassle over studies. Back in high school, Louis had high grades. Now the things he wants to learn about are outside the classroom window. And yet . . . water polo, parenthood, a successful law practice, a definitive study of Roman tyrants, birding . . . if you put everything into something, does that guarantee you'll get a full return? Louis wonders.

Birders are an oddly tight group . . . diverse but devoted to each other, because they define each other. And isn't that what it's really all about, the old tribal thing, updated? Identity, fraternity,

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support, yes . . . but are these a sufficient antidote to the anguish of the modern soul?



Terry, Don and Jolie Roberson

Under the black expanse of a Death Valley night, Suzanne Luther sits quietly a minute, then confesses to the indifferent desert and the stars, "You know, sometimes I wonder if there shouldn't be more to life than speeding down I-5, chasing some rare bird."

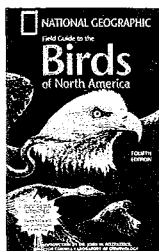
Terry Clark writes: *Yes, a ghost from the distant past . . . so there I was, sitting on the floor of my study strewn with old files and clippings, when I found an article I had written for New West magazine, back in 1976. The piece was to cover Memorial Day weekend in Death Valley, but it didn't get pub-*

lished because events never lived up to the editor's expectation of nudity and drugs and desert mayhem. At the time, birding was still too exclusive for a general interest readership – not enough crazies to generate much curiosity unless it rivaled the Hell's Angels' notoriety. But today the piece offers a glance back at "the way we were," back before cell phones, websites, high gas prices, spot-specific checklists, and I don't know what else, now that our focus has shifted (or perhaps I should say expanded). 

Note: All photos are from the Clarks' scrapbook and were taken in the mid-1970s.

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CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Updates:

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

SONAR: The Administration had given the Navy a blank check to use its new sonar system in 75% of the world's oceans which scientists have said would devastate huge numbers of marine mammals and other oceanic wildlife. Recent testing of this sonar equipment, which is used to locate submarines, has caused many whales to beach themselves and eventually die. Sonar waves destroy the animals' inner ears that enable them to find food and mates and generally control their equilibrium. Environmentalists have taken the Navy to court where a federal judge has issued a temporary injunction halting the use of the new equipment until experts can find places in the oceans where sonar will not harm marine life.

OVERFISHING: In recent years the numbers of fish in the Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary has declined alarmingly with overfishing the prime culprit. With the call from the Natural Resources Defense Council, thousands of people have asked the agencies involved to take action to reverse this ominous trend. In October this year the California Fish and Game Commission voted to set aside 12 reserve areas in the sanctuary that will be completely off-limits for fishing beginning January 2003. The marine reserves' 175 square miles represent 19% of the waters that surround the sanctuary's five islands. Though commercial fishermen are already screaming, the expected increase in numbers and species of fish may eventually include areas outside the protected area.

CONDORS RETURN TO MEXICO! After 50 years, biologists have released three California Condors to a remote mountainous area in Baja California.

Condors formerly ranged from Canada to Mexico so now we may celebrate the beginning of a new international status for this remarkable bird. Biologists are talking about introducing 20 more condors.


OREGON ORVs: Beachgoers in Oregon have long-complained to authorities about off-road vehicles using the beaches as vehicular playgrounds. The state surveyed about 6500 beachgoers and found that the great majority wanted ORVs severely limited. Three out of four agreed to limit their own activities to protect wildlife such as the Snowy Plover. The state will use this data in framing their projected "blueprint for coastal management and habitat safeguards for the Snowy Plover."

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY SUED: Three environmental organizations have sued the EPA for allowing the pesticide fenthion to be used as a mosquito control in Florida. They say that the pesticide has killed over 200 migratory birds and one endangered Piping Plover. Spraying also killed fiddler crabs in Rookery Bay National Estuary Reserve. University of Florida scientists say that fenthion almost wiped out the nation's rarest butterfly, the Schaus swallowtail, in the Florida Keys.

WOOD THRUSH NOT SINGING IN THE RAIN: A study by the prestigious National Academy of Sciences indicates that, in addition to forest destruction, "another man-made factor in the environment – acid rain – appears to be a major cause of the Wood Thrush's decline." In the eastern U.S. the numbers have fallen by 40% since 1980. The greatest losses occurred where acid rain was highest.

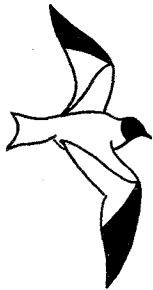
PESTICIDE LINKED TO FROG DEFORMITIES: A field study by a UC Berkeley biologist has linked the "most widely used pesticide in the United States", atrazine, to deformities in midwestern frogs. The study has important implications for agribusiness and an on-going federal review of atrazine's safety. An industry-financed panel of "scientists" has already prepared a written challenge to discredit the study's implication that the "popular farm chemical might be causing some of the widely-observed declines in U.S. amphibian populations."

WORLD-WIDE PLANT EXTINCTION: *Science* magazine quotes a new study indicating that the number of plants faced with extinction is far higher than formerly believed. If tropical species are included, the estimate of extinction reaches 47%. The primary threats are global warming and human encroachment. The researchers say that "identifying threatened species is a crucial step toward developing better management plans to protect them."

IVORY TRADE BAN RELAXATION: Kenya is reporting that poachers have begun slaughtering more endangered elephants in anticipation that some African countries will be allowed to restart the ivory trade. By November 2002, 81 Kenyan elephants have been illegally killed compared to 57 last year. And Kenya says that an effort by South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia to loosen the ivory trade ban at a forthcoming meeting of African nations would "endanger the entire population of African elephants." 

Thank You, Los Angeles Audubon Society . . .

Stand tall! We should be very proud that we just co-sponsored the most successful Western Field Ornithologists meeting ever – thanks to the cooperation of the combined membership of the Los Angeles and Sea and Sage Audubon Societies, and Western Field Ornithologists. The generosity of LA Audubon in sponsoring the barbecue and featured speaker played a big part in assuring the success of this meeting.



The combined LAAS and S&S planning committee was comprised of Jean Brandt doing field trip coordination; Kimball Garrett providing help including menu preparation, speaker introductions, and leading field trips; Lena Hayashi acting as punch list master, among other things; Carol Getz recruiting the many volunteers involved to staff the meeting; Nancy Kenyon doing the mammoth job of coordinating registration, handling the communications plus acting as webmaster; and Lucy Lee organizing the incredible barbecue. Mabel Alazard designed the brochure for the scientific program and all the graphics, making sure that each group (WFO, LAAS, S&S) had their logo printed as a background on everything. Look out for the wonderful new banner with our Western Tanager logo that hung over all the proceedings. Besides LAAS, Sea and Sage, Bishop, El Dorado, Pasadena, San Bernardino, South Coast, Whittier Area, Kern, Granite Bay, San Francisco, and San Fernando Audubon chapters had individual members who directly helped with the meeting.

More than 190 people registered, nearly doubling the previous attendance record for WFO meetings that are popular but not widely attended. We served barbecue to well over 150 people, 130 attended the banquet, and the science sessions were standing room only in a room that seated 190. Alaska, Michigan, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Con-

necticut, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Mexico, British Columbia, Washington and, of course, California were represented at the meeting.

Participating in the program from southern California were, Jon Dunn, Robert Pitman, Philip Unitt, Dick Purvis, Scott Thomas, Chrissy Mukai Tischer, Bill Haas, Richard Erickson, Adrian del Nevo, and Kathy Keane who presented their research. Gail Hall of the National Audubon Sanctuary at Starr Ranch presented research from a project she conducted in Alaska. Pete De Simone and Dana Kamada of Starr Ranch led a field trip at their facility. Walter Piper, professor of biology at Chapman College in Orange presented his long-term findings on loons plus he showed off the parrot colony he monitors in Orange County. Sylvia Gallagher did a first time ever (incredibly popular) experts sounds panel. UC Irvine presented their current data on their San Joaquin marsh restoration. Robb Hamilton presented his updates on the California Gnatcatcher. The Nature Conservancy in Orange County saw to it that we had access to portions of their holdings.

Dan Cooper came from San Francisco to ensure sure that the field trip to the Los Angeles River was a success. Los Angeles and Sea and Sage Audubon trip leaders participated in nearly every field trip and they doubled up with leaders from every walk of ornithology in the west. Scott Thomas, John Fitch, and John Bradley arranged to have us visit the NWR at the Naval Ammunitions Depot in Seal Beach. Editors of *Wild Bird*, *Birding*, and *Western Birds* attended. The directors of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and the Great Basin Bird Observatory came as well and joined up to lead field trips with the local leaders. Doug Willick, Steve Howell, Robb Hamilton, Mike San Miguel Jr., Kimball Garrett, Jon Dunn, and Mary Beth Stowe sat on experts ID panels.

Jon Dunn, Kimball Garrett, and Mike San Miguel served on the steering committee for this project along with Jean Brandt, Carol Getz, Lena Hayashi, Nancy Kenyon, Lucy Lee, Sally Menzel,

Judy Fritts, Neal Anderson, Chris Byrd, Mabel Alazard, and Catherine Waters. Only positive attitudes and cooperation existed during the planning of the meeting.

Tom Croom, Jon Dunn, Neal Anderson, Robert Waters, Mike San Miguel, Chris Obaditch, and Tom Getz stood over a hot barbie to feed a horde at the LAAS sponsored barbecue at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary.

Both evening speakers were fantastic, Philip Unitt at the barbecue and Robert Pitman at the banquet gave standing room only programs.

The proceeds of the conference, Western Field Ornithologists will net enough money to cover publication expenses for *Western Birds* for 2003 and for that Los Angeles Audubon and Sea and Sage should stand up and take a bow. It is the only journal or magazine devoted to ornithology field work about western birds. Western Field Ornithologists welcomes submissions from anyone doing field ornithology research in the west.

On the plus side for the Audubon Chapters, we now have representation on the WFO Board. In hopes of stronger ties between both groups in the future, Catherine Waters is the first member elected to the Western Field Ornithologists Board whose background is solely an Audubon Chapter. She was elected to a three year term and it is hoped that Audubon will participate more closely with this group and that WFO will participate more closely with Audubon Chapters. In that vein, WFO is currently working on a series of books about California Bird Records Committee decisions and birds of special concern in California. They are hoping Audubon Chapters will participate in getting these books into a printed format. The authors have donated their time in writing chapters for these books because it is important to all of us that these publications bring the standing (and plight) of birds in the western U.S. to a broader audience.

So, thanks again, LAAS, for co-sponsoring our conference. We hope to see many of you next year in Silver City, NM., at the end of July, 2003!

Cat Waters

Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Awards for 2002

As part of its educational mission, the Los Angeles Audubon Society annually presents the Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Award to support student research projects relevant to the biology of birds. Awards of up to \$2500 are given to students, amateurs, and other researchers who reside in southern California with limited access to major granting agencies or are currently enrolled in a southern California academic institution. There is no geographical restriction on the research area.

After careful review and evaluation of applications received for the 2002 Schreiber Award, the LAAS Executive Board voted to provide financial support to four students for their research projects.

To Matthew P. Alexander, San Diego State University, \$1725 for his project: "*Intraspecific Phylogeography of the White-headed Woodpecker*". This study examines the phylogeography of the White-headed Woodpecker (*Picoides albolarvatus*). Specimens will be collected (over a two year period) throughout the range of California, Oregon, and Washington to obtain genetic and morphological data. Mitochondrial DNA sequences and morphological measurements will be used to infer genetic and morphological variation between populations and subspecies to ascertain current and historical population patterns. This information will be used to infer a better determination of the relationship between the subspecies.

To James Rourke, San Diego State University, \$2500 for his project: "*The Use of Fluctuating Asymmetry to Identify Imperiled Bird Populations*". The objective of this study is to evaluate the use of fluctuating asymmetry (FA) as a tool for identifying imperiled avian populations. In an ideal, stress-free environment bilaterally symmetric characters (e.g. right vs. left arms in humans) would be produced that are morphometrically identical. When organisms are placed

under excessive stress during development stability mechanisms that buffer against the expression of asymmetric characters break down. Deviations from perfect symmetry are produced and expressed as minor discrepancies between right and left sides of bilaterally symmetric characters. These deviations are termed fluctuating asymmetries. The measurement of FA has been shown to be a sensitive, inexpensive method of assessing and monitoring environmental and genetic stress of wildlife populations, and therefore may be a valuable tool in identifying populations under stress that could suffer future declines. This study will determine the contemporary and historic FA levels for five species of birds that vary in population "health" from healthy/abundant to endangered. Contemporary FA levels will be derived from field sampling live birds at five MAPS stations (i.e. banding stations) within riparian areas of southern California. Historic FA levels will be derived from museum skins collected between 70-140 years ago from the same region.

To Karen T. Mabb, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona., \$2500, for her project: "*Factors that Promote the Proliferation of Red-crowned Parrots and Lilac-crowned Parrots in a Suburban Area of Los Angeles County*". Studies of parrot populations in the San Gabriel Valley since 1995 have shown that potential nests and food items were plentiful, and that the areas used by parrots were so disturbed by suburban activity that competition with native animal species appeared to be limited. Roost sites are proposed as the limiting factor in parrot prevalence. This research project will focus on determining parrot roost characteristics on the habitat and microhabitat level. A land cover classification of high-resolution satellite images will be performed in order to assess the habitat used by parrots. Microhabitat will be addressed by collecting data on tree canopy microclimate, noise, and illumination.

To Christine Levenson, San Diego State University, \$1500 for her project: "*Population Genetic Structure of Emperor Penguins (Aptenodytes forsteri) of the Ross Sea, Antarctica*". This project will use phylogeographic analysis to test if current distributions of Emperor Penguins can be explained by past environmental processes, and to determine what current population structure can tell about the life history of Emperor Penguins. Tissue samples will be analyzed using mitochondrial DNA to determine current genetic variation and past distribution of the species. The relationships between individuals from five distinct colonies will be explored by creating phylogenetic trees. Palaeoceanographic data will be overlapped with genetic data to determine what types of events occurred that would explain population subdivision.

Congratulations to all of our winning applicants, and LAAS hopes that this support will help them to continue to develop their careers in ornithological research!

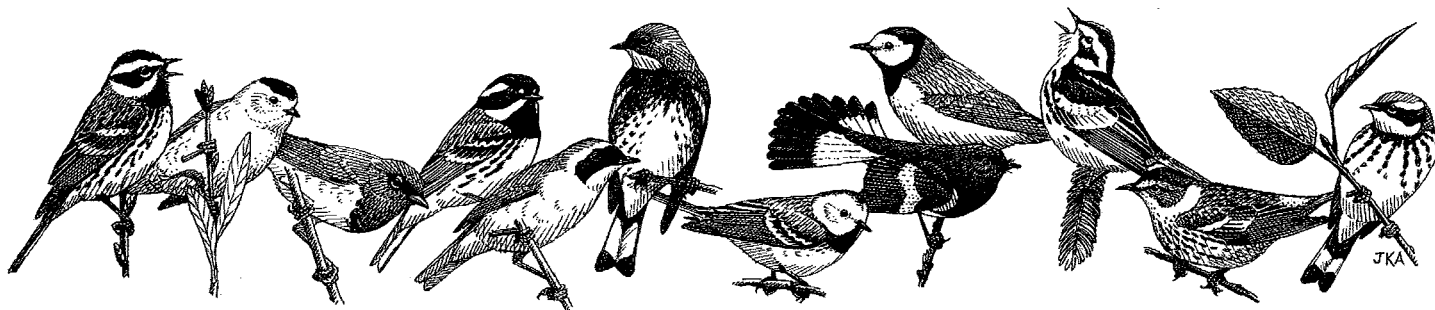
The application deadline for the 2003 Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Awards is January 31, 2003, and grants should be disbursed in May, 2003 with individual awards up to \$2500!

Interested applicants can obtain further information regarding this award, and application materials, by downloading the materials from the Society's website: laaudubon.org/involved/education.html

Or by contacting:

Chas Cowell
Grants Committee Chairman
LAAS
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or e-mail your request to:
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BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Shumway Suffel

Reprinted from *Western Tanager* July-August, 1976

Early May saw a continuation of the rather dull spring migration, with no major concentrations of western migrants reported after late April. However, scattered sightings of rare birds kept the telephone ringing as the month progressed. A call on May 5 from Doug Wilson, the ranger at Morongo Valley, told of a **Yellow-throated Vireo** (California's sixth), found by Douglas Morton that morning. It was later rediscovered, with difficulty, by many birders, including some of those on the LAAS field trip of May 8th. On their way to search for the vireo, Jon Dunn and Phil Unitt saw a very large white bird fighting the wind near the mouth of Big Morongo Canyon. A hurried study and a quick sketch on the back of an envelope convinced them (and the envious ones who did not see it) that it was a **Laysan Albatross!** This may be the first inland sighting in North America of any albatross, much less the rare Laysan. We can only speculate that this bird was flying north along the west coast of Mexico, became trapped in the Gulf; and, still heading north, flew overland to the Salton Sea; then overland again into San Geronio Pass.

An early morning call on Sunday, May 9 detailed the first verified mainland observation of a Cassin's Sparrow, near El Cajon, east of San Diego. (The three previous records were all from the Farallon Islands). This drab little sparrow made up for its lack of distinctive field marks by singing and skylarking from the top of the chaparral in its own inimitable manner.

One bird, at least, managed to escape the rare bird hotline—a **Common Grackle**, reportedly seen and photographed in early May at Morongo Valley by Dick Dean from Northern California. Regrettably, the sighting was not reported locally until May 16.

Yellow-billed Loons have been recorded sparingly on the Pacific Coast south to Monterey Co.—and there are two records for Baja California (Western Birds, vol. 6, #1); but there were no reports from Southern California until May 5, when Abigail King and Joan Mills studied a big loon off the Malibu coast. Because of its large size, bill shape, and extensive white on the face, they determined that it was a yellow-bill. It was seen by other birders during the week, who concurred in the identification. Even in our residential areas, two rare eastern warblers were reported—a singing male **Parula Warbler** (May 12) in Jan Tarble's Westwood neighborhood, and a male **Bay-breasted Warbler** in Ed Navojosky's bird bath near Olympic and Crenshaw on May 26. An unprecedented event was the early arrival at the Salton Sea of several hoped-for summer birds. Rich Stallcup's tour group studied a **Roseate Spoonbill** there on May 5; Arnold Small's party saw three **Black Skimmers**, a **Black Scoter** (the first inland record), and a **Red Phalarope** (but no Spoonbill) at the north end on May 9; Nancy Spear found two pairs of **Fulvous Tree Ducks** at Finney Lake and fifty **White-faced Ibis** at Unit 1, SSNWR, on May 10; and Bill Mack reported five **Gull-billed Terns**, eleven **Wood Storks**, and a **Laughing Gull** at the south end on

May 15. Some of these species are not expected there until late June or July.

The status of **Semipalmated Sandpipers** in So. Calif. is uncertain, because of their close resemblance to our abundant Western Sandpipers—particularly in the fall, when Westerns are less rufous. Thus it is only after most of the "Westerns" have left in the spring that locating and identifying "Semis" becomes somewhat easier. Our three sightings this spring are all from the south end of the Sea—between May 17 and June 5 (Rich Stallcup, Jon Dunn, and Van Remsen).

Summer Tanagers were widely reported and may be extending their breeding range. Jan Tarble found a singing male near Pearblossom on May 17, and Ed N. saw two males and a female at Mojave Narrows Park the same day. Larry Sansone found a female Summer at McGrath State Park on May 31, but nesting is unlikely along the coast. Arnold Small believes that **Indigo Buntings** are nesting along Mill Creek in the San Bernardino Mtns., as he saw a pair there in late May; and John Borneman saw Indigos at the same place in 1970. The **Hepatic Tanagers** had returned to Arrastre Creek in the San Bernardino Mtns., and may even have been raising young by June 6, according to the Brodskins. Further up Arrastre Creek, Kimball Garrett found a **Virginia's Warbler** on May 15.

There were several out-of-range reports of single **White-winged Doves**: Morongo Valley (a little north of their Colorado Desert range) on May 15 and thereafter (Bill Mack, et al); Bouquet Canyon on May 8 (Laura Jenner Vance);

Santa Barbara Island on May 9 (Dan Guthrie); and Oasis Ranch (a first for Mono Co.?) on May 31. Bill Mack also reports that four **Black Swifts** had returned to Santa Anita Canyon on May 14, and will probably nest there again. Encino Reservoir was a reliable place to find **Chimney Swifts** in late May and early June (Jon Dunn), but whether they nest locally is not known at this time. It is interesting to speculate that **Black Oystercatchers** might nest on the independent breakwater at Marina del Rey, as they've been seen rather consistently—with three there on May 19 (Jon Alderfer). A late **Evening Grosbeak** visited Bonnie Kennedy's feeder in Malibu Canyon on May 11. Most surprising to Don Sterba was hearing a **Whip-poor-will** calling persistently on the night of June 2 in the Ojai Valley (far west of previous reports, in the San Jacinto Mtns.)

Being human, but not necessarily rational, it is the rare-birder's nature to want, and expect, more and better birds on every trip into the field. So, there were many disappointed birders on the Inyo-Mono oases this May. Some had come to spend a week or two, but left in dismay after only a few days. True, neither the oases nor the islands were up to late May '75; but before we dismiss '76, let's take a look at the record.

Redstarts, Waterthrushes, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings were scattered sparingly at most well-birded spots. Van Remsen found a male **Bay-breasted Warbler** at Tollhouse Springs, east of Big Pine, on May 30; and at nearby Deep Springs College, sightings included a **Yellow-throated Vireo** (the 2nd this May, and the 7th State record), a **Blackburnian Warbler** (both Harry Kreuger), as well as a **Parula**, a **Chestnut-sided**, and a **Magnolia Warbler**. At Oasis Ranch there was a **Philadelphia Vireo** (first mainland spring record); a **Magnolia**, a **Chestnut-sided**, a **Blackpoll**, a **Black-and-White**, and a **Black-throated Green Warbler**, an **Ovenbird**, and a **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** (new for Mono Co.). Scotty's Castle hosted a **Red-eyed Vireo**, another **Philadelphia Vireo**, a **Blackpoll**, two **Parulas**, and two **Tennessee Warblers**. Furnace Creek Ranch produced an adult

Little Blue Heron (first inland record except for the Sea), two **Mississippi Kites** (less than 10 state records), a **Broad-winged Hawk**, an **Upland Sandpiper** (8th State record—Rich Stallcup and John Luther), a **Brown Thrasher**, and an **Eastern Kingbird** (only reports this year), a **Prairie Warbler** (first spring record—Arnold Small), a **Mourning Warbler** (third mainland record—Hank Brodtkin and the Clarkes), at least six **Bobolinks**, and another **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** (first for Inyo Co.). Further south, at China Ranch, near Tecopa, Jan Tarble found several pairs of **Lucy's Warblers** and a pair of **Summer Tanagers**, all presumably nesting.

The hardy souls who climbed 7900' Clark Mt., N.E. of Baker, in the predawn hours were rewarded with a **Painted Redstart**, May 8 & 15 (Garth Alton); **Whip-poor-wills**, May 8, 15, and 22; and a **Flammulated Owl** and **Gray Vireo**, May 15 (Guy McCaskie et al). South of Baker, at Kelso, Van Remsen photographed a very late **Rusty Blackbird** on April 28, saw a male **Blackpoll Warbler** on May 20, and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** the next day. At Fort Piute, N.W. of Needles, Steve and Karen Bailey watched a **Zone-tailed Hawk** flying out of the area on May 22; and Van Remsen saw an **Ovenbird** there on May 19. Further south, at Desert Center, Kimball Garrett found a **Red-eyed Vireo** (very rare in spring) and a late **Purple Martin** and **Bank Swallow** on May 30. In the southeast corner of the State, at Brock Ranch, Harry Kreuger discovered a **Bronzed Cowbird** (very few records west of the Colorado River area) on May 10. Closer to home, at Morongo Valley, there was a male **Indigo Bunting**, and a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on May 22 (Doug Wilson), and on May 23, a male **Bobolink** and a **Redstart** (Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin). Nearby, at Yucca Valley, Ed Navojosky found a **Black-and-White Warbler** on June 1.

Unlike May 29, 1975, few passerine vagrants were seen on the three LAAS trips to Santa Barbara Island—but Lee Jones had a **Dickcissel** and a **Grasshopper Sparrow** there earlier. On inaccessible San Nicolas Island he saw a rare **Worm-eating Warbler** on May 15, and, later in

the month, a **Magnolia** and a **Bay-breasted Warbler**.

Having reviewed the record, we must admit that plenty of Eastern vagrants were seen in So. Calif. this May; but they were scattered over a vast area and most were difficult to refind—so, few of the dozens of birders in the field saw even a small fraction of the species listed here. A year ago the coverage was not so thorough, but many of the birders saw most of the rare birds.

What will late summer bring? Probably not very much locally, although there have been a few very rare birds in past Augusts. The Salton Sea is always worthwhile in late summer, with Wood Storks, Laughing Gulls, and Gull-billed Terns probable, as well as Black-bellied Tree Ducks, Roseate Spoonbills, and Blue-footed Boobies. But if you can't give a full day to the Sea, stop briefly on your way to or from the Colorado River or Southeastern Arizona.

Another unique area to consider is Yosemite National Park (particularly Bridal Veil Camp, off the Glacier Point road—and Crane Flats off the Oak Flats road to the north of the valley). Both areas are at about 7000 feet, with extensive meadows surrounded by forests of tamarack and red fir. Here, and only here in California, can one hope for Goshawks, Great Gray Owls, Blue Grouse, Pileated and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills—and, above 10,000 feet, Rosy Finches. If you plan to camp, be sure to arrive early in the afternoon of a weekday to select a campsite.

By early August the shorebirds will be returning to our coasts. Some of the less common species (Baird's, Pectoral, and Solitary Sandpipers) are early migrants, but tend to frequent grassy ponds rather than beaches or mudflats. Later in the season, we can expect the start of the fall migration, and the excitement will begin all over again.

Until September, then, may I wish you, as Arnold Small once did, "a summer filled with blue skies and bright birds."



The Best Day Ever

The sky was crystal-clear and the temperature had dropped overnight. It was cold and the air was so crisp and sharp it hurt my smog-filled lungs. New snow blanketed the mountaintops and fall had definitely arrived in Denali National Park. My daughter Chris and I had reservations on the 9:00 A.M. shuttle bus but Chris decided that she couldn't take another long day in the field; rain and snow the previous day had really aggravated the pain caused by an automobile accident three weeks prior to our trip.

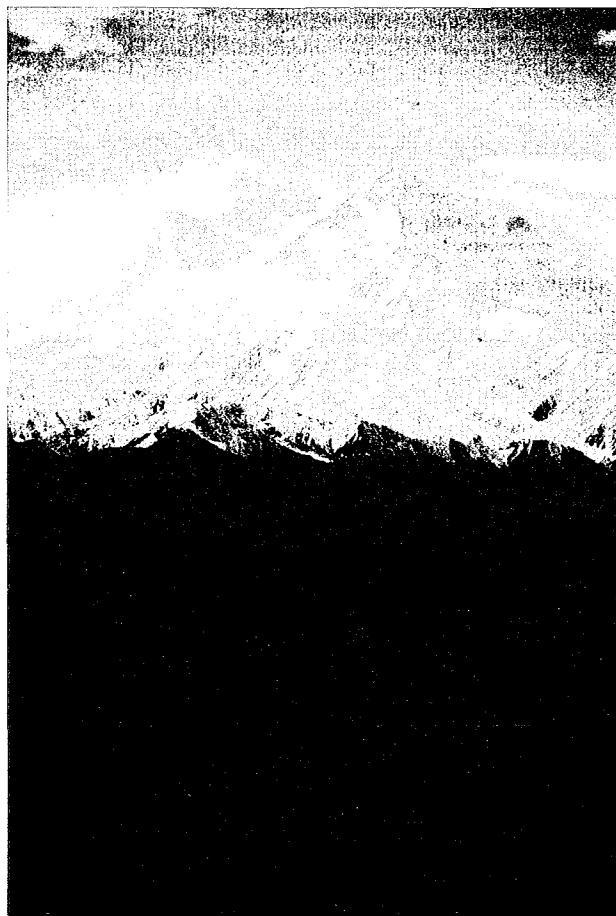
We had planned to revisit the fox den up on Sable Pass to see if the foxes were still in the area and try for some good photos but decided that I should go on the bus and she would spend some quality time with the moose along the paved road east of the Savage Campground. It was almost rutting season and the bulls had congregated to show off their splendid antlers and establish their harems.

Mt. McKinley put on a show that morning. The cloudless skies and the early morning sunlight glistering on its eternally snow covered peaks were mystical. Some people never get to see the mountain; we were able to see it well from every vantage point along the road.

We arrived at Sable Pass after ogling the usual sprinkling of Dall Sheep on the mountainsides of Igloo Canyon and enjoying the sight of a far distant grizzly up Tattler Creek. We were about three miles along the pass when the cry "WOLF!" stopped the bus in its tracks. Sure enough, a wolf was coming down the far hill on the left side of the road. We watched as it turned up the streambed and then started up the hill toward the road. Just as we were about to get close views of this rare animal, another bus – a Tundra Tour Bus – pulled past us and effectively blocked our view. I was infuriated but nothing could be done; the moment was lost. Our bus continued

along the pass and reached the fox den site in about one-mile. I got off. Free at last!

There was no sign of the foxes and I suspected that the family had left the den. We had seen an adult bring a squirrel to the den three days before. It had searched in vain for the kits before dropping the squirrel and leaving the area. (This was the one that almost stepped on my feet – I have poor photos of it.)



Mt. McKinley

I decided to hike back along the road and look for the wolf. Sable Pass is prime grizzly bear habitat and is totally off-limits to entry except along the road. One can't even put the leg of a tripod on the berm! Since we had seen a sow grizzly with two cubs in this area three days before, I was particularly attentive to anything that moved or made noise. There was nothing – no animals, no road traffic, no air traffic and (best of all) no

people – anywhere. I was completely alone and I loved it. The silence was euphoric. An occasional White-crowned Sparrow burst forth with its lovely song and a gentle breeze ruffled the leaves but that was an integral part of the silence. It's hard to describe.

I continued walking along the road, enjoying the fall colors. I had been told that tundra is magnificent at the end of summer but was unprepared for the spectacle that unfolded before my eyes. It looked like demented artists' pallet. Orange, purple, lavender, red, many shades of green, yellow, pink, blue – all mixed together in a wonderful spontaneous carpet of splendor. I took many pictures but Nikon and Fuji didn't capture those psychedelic colors.

In the back recesses of my mind I became aware of a sound that I had never heard before. It was wild, haunting – and getting louder and louder. Sandhill Cranes – huge flocks – swarms – of Sandhill Cranes! They circled and called, circled and called, and I quit estimating their numbers after 10,000. An hour and twenty minutes they kept coming and at times the sky was filled with these graceful birds with their over six foot wingspan.

I found out later that the cranes had been "staging" at Wonder Lake and had all taken off together that morning. This is an annual event but one that I felt very lucky to experience. I know that they winter on the Platte River in Nebraska, and I plan to go there one day, but this was special. Just me and 10,000 cranes – it can't get much better than that.

Walking back down Igloo Canyon was not an anticlimax. A Gyrfalcon, two Golden Eagles, several Merlin, and a red fox were momentary companions. The mountains tempted me to keep on walking.

I wish I had.

Jean Brandt

Save the Date!

Saturday, April 19, 2003

Special Bird Count!

We urge you to participate in our effort to become "America's Birdiest City". All over the U.S. cities are competing and Los Angeles should be a real contender for the title. Kimball Garrett says: "This sort of count (which must be conducted entirely within city limits) is silly in many ways, but even in Los Angeles there might be some political conservation clout in being able to say that "our city had the highest bird count in the country this year."

"I suggest L.A. birders consider jumping into the fray and with about 30-40 parties we could really do well. Reaching 200 species would be fairly easy, and with some scarce migrants, lingering wintering birds, and good luck with seabirds and shorebirds, we might be able to match San Diego's total of 218.

"Just to whet your appetite, consider that the following areas are ALL within the Los Angeles city limits.

COASTAL (10 sites) Pt. Fermin and offshore, Cabrillo Beach/L.A. Harbor, Terminal Island (western portion), San Pedro Parks: Peck, Leland, Averill, Friendship, Harbor Regional Park/Lomita Channel, Banning Park, Playa del Rey/Ballona Creek, Venice Beach (north to Rose Ave./Santa Monica city limit), Dockweiler State Beach (n. of El Segundo Blvd.), Will Rogers State Beach (west to Castellammare, east to just east of Channel Rd.)

L.A. BASIN AND VICINITY (21 sites), Hahn State Recreation Area/Baldwin Hills, Village Green, Exposition Park/USC Campus, Los Angeles River: Griffith Park to Downtown, Elysian Park, Silver Lake Reservoir, Debs Park, Echo Park, Griffith Park, Forest Lawn Hollywood, Hollywood Reservoir, Franklin Canyon/Reservoir, Stone Canyon Reservoir, Rancho Park, Los Angeles Country Club, UCLA Campus, Los Angeles National Cemetery/Veterans Administration, Sullivan Canyon, Mandeville Canyon, Pacific Palisades, Temescal Gateway Park

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY (14 sites)
Sepulveda Basin, Encino Reservoir, Pierce College, Bell Canyon Park, Chatsworth Reservoir, Verdugo Hills (north slope, west of Lowell Ave.), La Tuna Canyon, Big Tujunga Wash, Hansen Dam, Veteran's Park/El Cariso Park, O'Melveny Park, Limekiln Canyon, Browns Canyon, Stoney Point

We hope that other local Audubon Chapters and participants in local Christmas Bird Counts will join in this count. Yes, Kimball, it is silly – but then what else is there to do but bird on a Saturday in April? And, if we can make a "happening" out of it and also become the "birdiest city", then it should be fun for all.

Please email Kimball at kgarrett@nhm.org or phone him at (213) 763-3368 and be part of the 1st Annual Birdiest City Search.

Blast from the Past

What a pleasure it is to return to 1976 with Terry and friends on their quest for rare birds and to once again read one of Shum Suffel's great *Birds of the Season* reports! Birding in southern California has come a long way in the footsteps of these trail blazers.

The *Birds of the Season* column has a historic reputation for great writing and reporting. Previous authors were David Gaines, Shum Suffel, Hal Baxter, Hank Brodtkin, Kimball Garrett, and Dan Cooper – names familiar to us all.

Unfortunately, Dan has commitments that prevent him from writing further columns and we need someone new to take over the report. That person must be up-to-date on distribution of birds in southern California, be selective as to the reliability of the reports, and most of all, be able to write well. The column is only published six times a year, and with modern technology such as the web, Bird Box, and various electronic devices, it should not be a difficult commitment – but it is one that requires dedication and a lot of talent.

This is an important feature of the *Western Tanager* and has always been a good reference for people interested in regional distribution. We need to continue *Birds of the Season*. Please call Jean Brandt at (818) 788-5188 or e-mail her at jeanb1@juno.com if you find this a challenge you can meet.

Upcoming Birding Events

Salton Sea International Bird Festival

Southeastern California Desert Birding Paradise
February 14-17, 2003

The festival offers four types of guided tours for all levels of birding. All tours are by comfortable, fully-equipped buses or vans. It is possible to see 100 species of birds per day. Several seminars have been planned and the Keynote Speakers are Pat and Clay Sutton who will present a program titled "How to Spot An Owl".

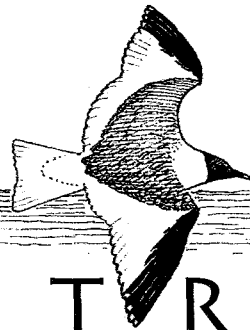
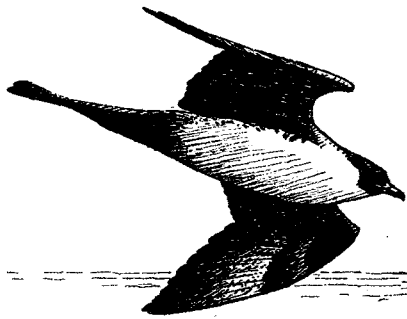
For information call (760) 344-5359 or
e-mail: birdfest@quix.net

Yuma Birding and Nature Festival

Southwest Ecotourism Alliance
April 9-13, 2003

A four-day event of guided tours, top speakers, and educational workshops. This exciting adventure and learning experience is for all ages and levels. Celebrate the diversity of the lower Colorado region where over 380 species of birds and other exciting wildlife make their home.

For information call (800) 293-0071



PELAGIC TRIPS

Saturday, February 22 – Palos Verdes Escarpment to the Redondo Canyon:

This eight hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 7:30 A.M. on the R/V UCLA Seaworld.

Birds seen on prior trips: Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed, Black-vented, Sooty, and Pink-footed shearwaters; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarity: Ancient Murrelet. Gray whales and dolphins are often seen.

Leaders: **Kimball Garrett, Kevin Larson, Bernardo Alps** (Cetacean Society).

\$50 – Coffee, no galley.

Sunday, May 4 – Marina del Rey 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; 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 25 years).

Leaders: **Michael J. San Miguel, Bernardo Alps** (Cetacean Society).

\$65 – Coffee, no galley

Saturday, June 7 –

Landing on **Santa Cruz Island** at Prisoner's Cove for about one hour and then pelagic birding south toward Anacapa Island. A ten hour trip departs from Island Packers dock in Ventura at 8:00 A.M. on the M/V Sunfish.

The endemic **Island Scrub-Jay** is easily seen here. Then we will cruise south of the island toward Anacapa Island. Birds seen 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: Flesh-footed Shearwater; South Polar Skua; Tufted Puffin seen in 2002.

Leaders: **Michael J. San Miguel, Jonathan Feenstra, Bernardo Alps** (Cetacean Society).

\$75 – No galley.

Saturday, September 6 –

A **deep water trip** toward **Cherry, Tanner, and Cortez** banks. This twelve hour trip departs from Santa Barbara Harbor at 7:00 A.M. on the fast catamaran the Condor Express.

This is our Red-billed Tropicbird Trip: We go far offshore in three counties, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara. Birds to be expected: Black, Least, Ashy, and Leach's storm-petrels; Pomarine and Long-tailed jaegers; South Polar Skua; Sabine's Gull. Rarities: Black-footed Albatross; Buller's Shearwater; Arctic Tern; Craveri's Murrelet. Blue, Fin, and Minke whales as well as several species of dolphins have been seen on this trip.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, Kimball Garrett, David Pereksta, Todd McGrath.**

\$150 – There is a full galley on board which seats 60 people in comfort. There are large windows that allow you to observe the ocean while seated.

Saturday, October 4 –

A **deep water trip** south of **San Miguel Island** to **Richardson's Rock** and cruise out to 1000 Fathoms. This eight hour trip

departs from Santa Barbara Harbor at 8:00 A.M. on the fast catamaran the Condor Express.

Birds to be expected: Black-vented, Pink-footed, Buller's, and Sooty shearwaters; Black, Ashy, Leach's, and Least storm-petrels; Pomarine Jaeger; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger; Sabine's Gull; Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets; perhaps Common Murre and Pigeon Guillemot. Rarities: Flesh-footed shearwaters.

Leaders: **Mitch Heindel, David Pereksta, Barney Schlinger, Peter Cantle, Bernardo Alps** (Cetacean Society).

\$110 – There is a full galley on board which seats 60 people in comfort, with large windows which allow you to observe the ocean while seated.

Saturday, October 25 –

Northern Channel Islands Monument Trip: Anacapa, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz Islands toward San Miguel Island. Twelve 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; Leach's, 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: Flesh-footed, and Buller's shearwaters; South Polar Skua; Long-tailed Jaeger. Blue, Finback, and Humpback whales have been seen on this trip. In 2002 a Streaked Shearwater was seen.

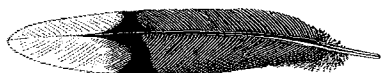
Leaders: **David Pereksta, Michael J. San Miguel, Jonathan Feenstra,**

Bernardo Alps (Cetacean Society).

\$90 – Limited galley on board. Box lunches can be ordered from a nearby deli.

Saturday, November 8 –
Ventura Marina toward and past **San Miguel Island** on the fast catamaran M/V Islander. Nine hour trip departs from Ventura at 8 A.M. and returns by 5 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: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Sooty, and Pink-footed shearwaters; Leach's Storm-Petrel; South Polar Skua; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; rocky shorebirds (up to five); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Craveri's Murrelet; Rarities: Flesh-footed and Buller's shearwaters; Black-footed Albatross. Leaders: **Kimball Garrett, David Pereksta, Michael J. San Miguel, Bernardo Alps** (Cetacean Society) \$95 – Limited snack type galley on board.

Note: In order to meet unexpected increases in costs there can be a \$5 energy/fuel surcharge.



Unsung Heroes

There are two volunteers who have worked for LAAS for such a long time that one of them doesn't even remember how long ago he started! Phil Sayre has organized our pelagic trips for over 20 years and Nick Freeman has organized our field trips (in two stints) for many years. Both Phil and Nick do outstanding work scheduling trips and providing leaders. It's not easy to ask people to lead trips and a lot of tact as well as arm pulling is involved. They seem to come up with the best trips and leaders possible and always do it cheerfully.

Gentlemen, we salute you and thank you for your dedication to LAAS.

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.*

Bird Tape (323) 874-1318

Jon Fisher records the Bird Tape. Please report interesting bird sightings to him at:

Jon Fisher
 (818) 544-5009 (work)
 Jon.L.Fisher@disney.com

Records of rare and unusual birds reported for *Birds of the Season* 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:

North American Birds, L.A. Co.
 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:

Jon Fisher: (818) 544-5009 (work)
 e-mail: Jon.L.Fisher@disney.com

WESTERN Tanager

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F I E L D T R I P S

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

Sunday, January 5 –

Topanga State Park. Ken Wheeland and Chris Tosdevin will lead participants through this diverse coastal mountain area. An ideal trip for a beginning birder or someone new in the area. 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. From PCH, take Topanga Cyn. Blvd. 5 miles to Entrada Rd. Parking \$2. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, January 11 –

West Antelope Valley. Leader: **Scott Harris.** Always popular, with winter raptors like Ferruginous, Rough-legged, and multi-flavored Red-tailed hawks, Prairie Falcon and Merlin; as well as Mountain Bluebird and Mountain Plover all possible. Take Hwy 14 N to Avenue S (next to Lake Palmdale). Drive into the Park-and-Ride just east of the exit. Meet at 8:00 A.M. near the E end of the lot. Bring lunch (and a chair?) for a full day of fun in the fields. No fee, no reservation. FRS radio helpful.

Sunday, January 12 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader: **Ray Jillson.** View colorful resident and wintering 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 8:15 A.M.

Saturday, January 18 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. Leader: **Ann and Eric Brooks.** This trip covers landscaped parkland and natural coastal scrub habitats, and is paced for beginning birders and members of the Baldwin Hills community. The park entrance is off of La Cienega Blvd. Between Rodeo Rd. and Stocker St.

After passing the entrance kiosk (\$3 entry fee), turn left (leading to the "Olympic Forest") and park in the first available spaces. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

Saturday, January 18 –

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area.

Leader: **Kris Olenkamp.** "Freeway close" morning of birding. Kris has led this walk on-and-off for 20 years, noting 200 species, and averaging 60-65 per walk. Take the 405 Fwy N into the San Fernando Valley, turn W on Burbank Blvd. and N (Rt.) on Woodley Ave. to the second Rt., which is marked "Wildlife Area". Turn here and park in the lot at the end. Meet at 8:00 A.M. and bird until about 11:30 A.M.

Sunday, January 19 –

Ballona Wetlands. **Bob Shanman** will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland and adjacent rocky jetty. Large-billed Savannah Sparrows should be in, if they are coming. 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, January 25 –

Lakeview and Lake Perris.

Leader: **Howard King.** We will not visit San Jacinto WR, due to the hunting season. Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, and Tufted Duck all real possibilities. Take the I10 or 60 Fwy E to the 215 Fwy S, exit E onto Ramona Expressway. Continue to the Lakeview Market at the corner of Davis Road. Meet here at 8:00 A.M.. Bring lunch, warm clothing, and footwear for possible mud. No fee for the trip, but possible entrance fee.

Saturday-Sunday, February 1 and 2 –

Salton Sea. Leader: **Nick Freeman.**

For Sandhill Cranes, meet up with Nick Saturday at Cattle Call Park, south of Brawley, departing at 3:30 P.M. Take Hwy 111 south to Brawley, head W thru town on Main Street, then continue

S on Hwy 86 to a fairly quick right on Cattle Call Drive, continuing down the hill and veering left to the other side of the park. Sunday morning, we will regroup (and welcome late-comers) 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, Inca Dove, and Yellow-footed Gull. Anticipate mud. Bring lunch, 'scopes, warm clothes. Registration fee \$5. Send SASE to LAAS. No limit.

Sunday, February 2 –

Topanga State Park. Leaders: **Ken Wheeland and Chris Tosdevin.** Meet at 8:00 A.M. See January 5 listing for details.

Friday, February 7 –

Gull Study Workshop. **Larry Allen**

will take us beyond the standard plumage reviews of this oft confusing collection of birds. The important skills of aging various gull species, and techniques for discrimination among the less familiar gull taxa will be addressed. Slides, skins and hand-outs will be used to demonstrate I.D. marks of many common and uncommon gulls of the west coast in their various plumages. No fee for lecture! Meet at Eaton Canyon Nature Center, Pasadena, from 7 P.M. to 10 P.M. Limit: 70 signups. Reservation by SASE to Audubon House for directions. See listing for gull field trip below.

Sunday, February 9 –

Gull Study Fieldtrip. **Larry Allen**

will be looking for gulls to demonstrate points made during the Friday lecture (see above). Thayer's Gull likely. We will meet at 9:00 A.M. at Doheny State Beach by Dana Point in Orange County – a site that boasts the largest concentration of gulls in the coastal southland, and some of the most unusual sightings. Gather at the west edge of the estuary by the lifeguard tower, and finish up around 1:00 P.M. There is a small fee for parking at Doheny. Send \$10 and a SASE to LAAS to sign-up, and for directions. Limit: 25. Bring 'scopes and your favorite field guide.

Sunday, February 9 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader: **Ray Jillson.**

Meet at 8:15 A.M.

See January 12 listing for details.

Saturday, February 15 –

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.

Leader: **TBA.** Meet at 8:00 A.M.

See January 18 listing for details.

Sunday, February 16 –

Ballona Wetlands. **Bob Shanman** leads.

Meet at 8:00 A.M.

See January 19 listing for details.

**Saturday-Sunday,
February 22 and 23 –**

Carrizo Plain.

Leaders: **Nick** and **Mary Freeman.**

Meet at 8:00 A.M. in Maricopa. Good for hawks, falcons, eagles, and often Mountain Plover! Sandhill Cranes, elk and

pronghorn hopeful. If possible, please carpool or avail your vehicle to others when you reserve. \$5 per person. Limit: 14. Your phone number will be released for carpooling unless you request otherwise. Sign-up with Audubon House for exact directions and information. Reserve your own room in Buttonwillow for Saturday night. (Motel 6 is here).

Sunday, March 2 –

Topanga State Park.

Leaders: **Ken Wheeland** and **Chris**

Tosdevin. Meet at 8:00 A.M.

See January 5 listing for details.

Sunday, March 9 –

Whittier Narrows. Leader: **Ray Jillson.**

Meet at 8:15 A.M. See January 12 listing for details.

Saturday-Sunday, March 22 and 23 –

Anza Borrego with **Fred Heath.** The

spring explosion of desert flora and fauna should be well under way in the Colorado Desert, including butterflies and early birds in the throes of breeding activity. Suggested accommodations: Tamarisk Grove Campground (reserve through Destinet (800) 444-7275), or Stanlund Motel in Borrego Springs (619) 767-5501. Anticipate a busy weekend, and reserve camping by January 22, or motels earlier. Limit 20 people. Send SASE with \$5 fee to LAAS to learn 7:00 A.M. meeting place and more details. Pleasant days, cool to cold nights.

**Saturday-Sunday, April 5 and 6 –
Owens Valley Grouse Trip.**

Mary Freeman leads. Limited to 20. Meet early in Big Pine Saturday. Blue and Sage grouse, raptors. Just the scenery is worth it! To sign up, send \$10 and a SASE to LAAS. More details next newsletter.

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 INTERNATIONAL TOURS

THE BEST OF COSTA RICA – February 23-March 5

Wait-listing accepted.

AMAZON VOYAGE – PERU – June 14-22

Machu Picchu, Extension – June 22-27

Cruise the upper Amazon aboard a graceful 19th century style expedition ship. Excursions up streams in small boats into seasonally flooded forests, and walks in dry forests offer specialized birding and wildlife. A perfect combination of comfort and adventure. Continue your journey to Machu Picchu the Heart of the Inca Empire.

SOUTH AFRICA – BOTSWANA – November 13-23

ZAMBIA Extension – November 23-29

Travel through this magnificent land of untamed beauty by way of a modern safari. Wildlife is prolific. Then continue your adventure to ZAMBIA, with views of Victoria Falls, and the Luangwa National Park, where one of the richest concentrations of mammals and birds in Africa can be found.

FOR ITINERARIES and MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Olga Clarke, Travel Director

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY

Ph/Fax: (818) 249-9511

e-mail: oclarketravel@earthlink.net

EVENING MEETINGS

Tuesday, January 7 Jim Bland –
Blue Grouse: the Spotted Owl of California's Gamebirds?

With their twin-shafted contour feathers, feathered legs, snowshoe feet, and fir needle diet, Blue Grouse are well adapted to life in the northern Boreal Forest. Their presence in southern California is therefore a bit of a biogeographic anomaly, and a bonus to regional bird lists. In the early 1900s, the range of the Mt. Pinos subspecies extended from the Kings River Canyon south, across the isolated mountaintops of Kern County, to the Mt. Pinos area of northern Ventura County. Blue Grouse were last documented in the Mt. Pinos area in the late 1970s, and surveys conducted last spring suggest the species no longer occurs anywhere south of Tulare County. Join us as Jim Bland, Professor of Biology at Santa Monica College, draws on 10 years of field experience to show how changes in habitat may be disrupting the life cycle of this species. In terms of habitat, Blue Grouse may have more in common with Spotted Owls than their gamebird next of kin.



Tuesday, February 11 Tim Allyn –
California's Wild Heritage

Join us to celebrate California's wilderness. Tim Allyn will present the California Wild Heritage Campaign, its successful efforts to bring the message of wilderness protec-



tion to California that has resulted in the introduction of the California Wild Heritage Act, a federal bill, introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer and Congresspersons Hilda Solis and Mike Thompson. The presentation will include a slide show of California's wild places and a discussion on how L.A. Audubon can assist in the effort to protect California's wild and living heritage for future generations.

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

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 in
 Plummer Park**

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

www.laaudubon.org/general/plmprk.html

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!

