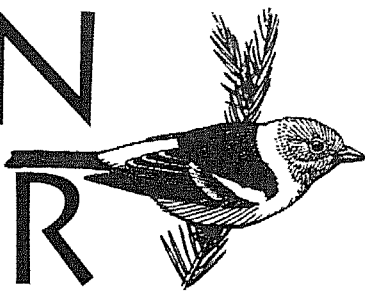


# WESTERN TANAGER



Volume 71 Number 2 November/December 2004

Los Angeles Audubon Society

## Colorado Chicken Run

by Dexter Kelly

Colorado has always been a good state for birders to visit, since it has such a great variety of habitats and a large number of species. After the discovery that the Gunnison Sage-Grouse is a species separate from the Greater Sage-Grouse, it became a mandatory Mecca for most birders who keep North American lists. And it was soon realized that a visit to the leks of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse in late winter and early spring could be joined with visits to displaying grounds of five other "chickens" which could be found within the state's borders, a within a day's drive of each other. Along with the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, these gallinaceous glories include Greater and Lesser prairie-chicken, Greater Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Blue Grouse, and White-tailed Ptarmigan.

The ptarmigan can only be found in tundra terrain above the tree line, and that habitat becomes accessible in April at the earliest, when enough snow melts to clear Guenella Pass and other roads that give access to enough tundra to provide a good chance of finding these birds. April is also the month when breeders like McCown's Longspur and Mountain Plover return to the grasslands, and all three species of rosy finch can still be seen at feeding stations.

So April is the birder's month of hajj to Colorado, and this year my wife and I elected to join the pilgrims during Easter week, spring break for her. Normally we look for birds on our own, but this time we decided to join one of the many birding tour groups swarming over the state

in spring break week. I had no confidence in my ability to find the leks, and get both of us up before dawn to wait outside in the freezing wind for the birds to become visible. Besides, a tour would be most likely to find the least-visited little-known leks, and get us front-row seats. And it's great to be driven, instead of having to drive over fifteen hundred miles in stormy weather across mountains and plains. I'm getting too old for that.

Colorado tours can cost upwards of three thousand dollars, but we selected Mike Flieg's *Ornifolks* trip, a good deal at \$875. It included lodging and transportation from site to site, but we paid for our meals. We were crammed three to a seat into the vans, but Mike delivered the birds – all but a couple, at least

### Greater Prairie-Chicken

We saw our first chickens the evening of the day after we were picked up in Denver. The Greater Prairie-Chickens were dancing between the legs of Black Angus cattle released into an irrigated field where seedling grass was growing. Mike took us there just at sunset, after we had checked in to a seedy motel in the tiny cattle town of Wray, some 200 miles east of Denver. It was on private ranchland traversed by RD45, which led east off Route 385 running north of Wray. This was one of more than a hundred leks in the area, as reported by the landowner.

The birds were not intimidated by the cattle, just as they were not bothered by buffalo when millions roamed these short-grass plains. But humans had to keep their distance, at least a hundred yards away. We were encouraged to stay behind or near our vans, which act as rolling blinds. Through 'scopes we saw them hunker down with tails stuck up, scurrying back and forth to try and impress the few females that were left this late in the season. They were barred all around, with bright white undertail coverts, like white-tailed deer. The orange gular sac was visible in the evening light, with the sun setting behind us.



Photos by Brian Small

Greater Prairie-Chicken.

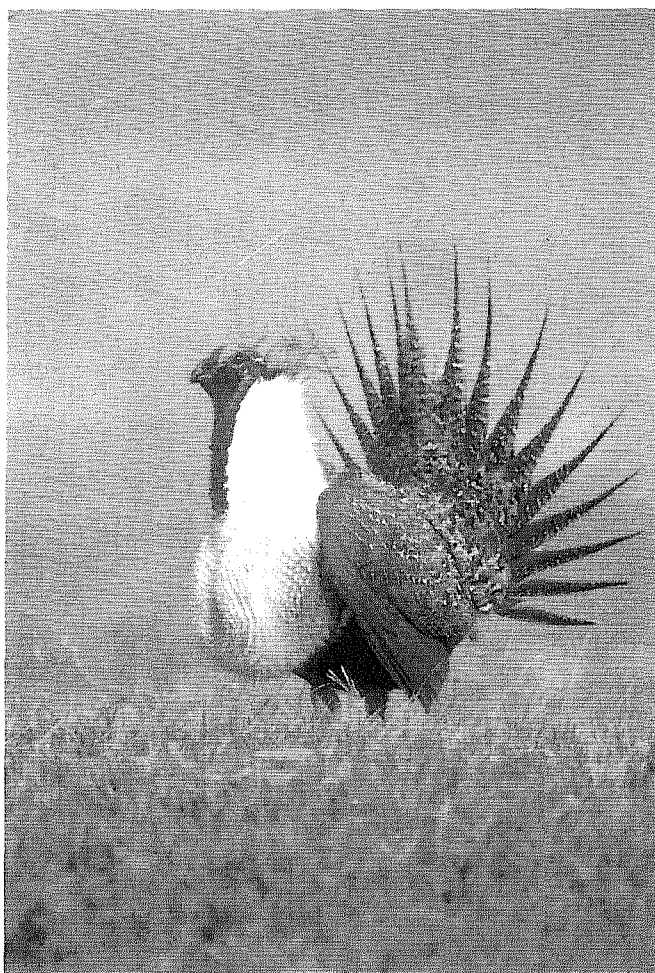
We hoped to get a better look the next morning, maybe get a bit closer before the sun came up. But the birds were still far away, and invisible in the pre-dawn darkness. A soft murmuring din was heard, reflected off the low undulating hills to our rear, and Mike said this was the sound the cocks were making as they danced in the dark.

This was true of all the birds on the leks: most of the displaying was done in pre-dawn darkness, and the dance broke up before the sun came up. Maybe this timing evolved to avoid predators. It certainly explains why the displays are so flamboyant and visually striking; the hens have to see it in the dark. All those nature documentaries showing the displays must have been filmed just before dawn or sunset, most likely near dawn, when the dancing is most vigorous and complex.

All we could see were shapes zigzagging back and forth in the darkness, ever so slowly becoming more visible. An hour passed before I could make out the barring pattern, and distinguish the bird from the white flag of its upraised tail. The birds were more active than in the evening; even the females were acting territorial, chasing each other like territorial males. We could see the action before the colors and patterns of the birds were discernible. Not until the sun was almost up could I see the color of the male's gular sac again. And then the sun came up in our eyes.

### **McCown's Longspur and Mountain Plover**

The Pawnee National Grasslands would better be called wasteland, overgrazed, barren, and eroded. Colorado has suffered from years of drought, but the worst damage has come from cattle. The Department of Agriculture administers the National Grasslands and permits agricultural exploitation of this fragile habitat, just as they allow lumber companies to clear-cut national forests. The Pawnee National Grasslands are also open for recreation, which includes hunting, and on this April Sunday, target shooting.



*Greater Sage-Grouse*

Along the road we were on, there were bunches of "plinkers" every few hundred yards, some with semiautomatic weapons. The few rangers present were racing back and forth, trying to keep the shooting under control. Some groups had targets, some not. Pronghorns could have been hit by rifle bullets zinging far across the open prairie.

We were after longspurs and Mountain Plover. Fortunately, while Mike stopped to talk to the rangers, there were a couple of puddles that attracted birds from the arid plains. At five-minute intervals, flocks of McCown's Longspurs would swoop in, grab a drink, and cautiously fly away. We could stand close enough to make out the red patch on the wing and the black breast spot. The birds were more heavily streaked than the illustration in the Sibley guide would indicate. While we were gazing at these (for me) lifers, Mike got a tip about a location for Mountain Plover, which is becoming increasingly hard to find. On the way to the plover site, we passed a

trio of bare trees, each of which held large nests. Two of these belonged to Ferruginous Hawks. There were adults and recently fledged juveniles, who swooped about as the parents stood on the nest. Someone saw a Merlin hassling one of the big hawks. Further on, we saw a female harrier that some tried to make into a Prairie Falcon. But the axillaries weren't black, and a white rump patch was well in view. (Oddly enough, we never did see a Prairie Falcon anywhere in the entire trip.)

Following directions, we found a pair of Mountain Plover in a field by a farmhouse. They were in sharp, clear alternate plumage, rarely if ever seen in the Antelope Valley. But seeing this endangered bird anywhere in any plumage is an increasingly uncommon treat. The couple obliged us by mating as we watched! We can only hope that something precious will result from that union. Only two pairs of Mountain Plovers nested successfully last year on the Pawnee Grasslands, which once hosted the largest breeding population of the birds anywhere.

The last very good bird of the day was the other plains longspur, a Chestnut-collared Longspur in spectacular alternate plumage, which I had never seen. It was in a large flock of McCown's, which by now had become a "trash bird". We lined up at the 'scope for a quick look, unfortunately toward the west, into the sunset. I could see the pattern, but the rich chestnut of the collar all but merged into the back. I'll have to come back for a better look. This being a tour, we had to move on.

### **Greater Sage-Grouse**

The next day, after a night in Ft. Collins, we headed up into the Rocky Mountains via Route 14, which led along the La Cache de Poudre River. In the gorge we found dippers, whose walking underwater delighted the easterners. Canyon and Rock wrens called in the canyons, Mountain Bluebirds perched by the meadows, and Bighorn sheep were

spotted along the horizon line far above. A grayish accipiter flying high upslope was deemed to be a Goshawk. As the road mounted higher towards Cameron Pass, we entered the snow zone. Suddenly we were surrounded by snowdrifts too deep to tramp through. Mike had scheduled a stop at the Moose Creek Visitors Center, which had feeders that would draw winter birds in from the snowy woods. We were expecting Cassin's Finches, Pine Grosbeaks, up to three species of rosy finch, and more. But there had been an attack of avian botulism in the area, and all the visitor center feeders had been emptied or removed. There were a few Pink-sided Juncos and Mountain Chickadees at a nearby KOA campground feeder, but our morale was better bolstered by a light-phased Rough-legged Hawk spotted on the road into North Park, the vast valley that contained the little town of Walden, our next overnight stop.

That afternoon we drove through the Arapahoe Wildlife Refuge, which extends over several thousand acres in the southern stretches of North Park. The ponds and meadows hosted large flocks of ducks and geese on migration, along with a couple of prairie dog towns. The special treat was a second year Golden Eagle, with white mottling and pale on the back of the head.

But the main reason for passing through North Park was the Greater Sage-Grouse lek, which was off Route 14, southwest of Walden. We had to be there well before dawn, before 5 AM. We had to stay inside the van and had to peer hard through the darkness in search of dancing forms, first imagined, finally perceived. As the light grew, we could make out the entire dance. The cocks turned to each of the four directions and shook their inflated chests, the tail spread, spiky, spotted. Both head and tail were pointed upward as the cocks danced. Occasionally, they would break off the dance to chase young non-displaying males who might be moving in on the hens. The hens milled about, moving in groups from one displaying male to another.

The highest count of birds on the lek was forty-two; they were stretched over almost fifty yards of open land. But I couldn't make out the guttural dripping sound the dancers made. Perhaps we were upwind, or too far away. By the time the sun came up, the dancing was over.

### Blue Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse

Walden calls itself the moose capital of Colorado, and we dined at the Moose Creek Café. But we saw no moose in the streams and beaver ponds we passed as we headed south out of North Park on Route 14. The road led west over another mountain range and into a wooded valley, towards Steamboat Springs, which we went through, and on to Craig, another small cattle town that was to be our next night stop. On the way we picked up Sandhill Cranes and a Bald Eagle in a field, and yellow-bellied marmot and beaver along the river.

At an even smaller town called Hayden, a spur road led up a hill, past a yak ranch (!), to a saddle with a view of rolling, grazed-over hills, spotted with clumps of brush. This was supposed to be a good area for Blue Grouse, who do not gather in leks. For a long time we waited, eventually in the rain and the gathering dusk. Finally, a sharp-eyed lady in the group spotted a single male, far off under a ridgeline in a bare spot in the brush.

He looked so lonely, standing still and puffing out his white chest. The yellow gular sac was not visible. Maybe it was a young male. Or maybe he was

just too far away. We couldn't hear whatever sound he was making. And no female came out of the brush in response to his performance. But everyone felt lucky, even those who had seen Blue Grouse before.

The Blue Grouse stomping ground was cold and bleak, but the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek was colder and even drearier. These hardy birds were dancing in snow, in a frigid dawn, on a ridgeline alongside a paved road with almost no shoulders. This was Colorado RD27, known as "20-mile road." Big trucks were roaring by on the way to a nearby power plant, but the birds didn't mind the noise. They were more sensitive to the birders. Mike Flieg got us there early and positioned us just close enough to see the birds without getting too close to make them retreat behind the ridgeline.

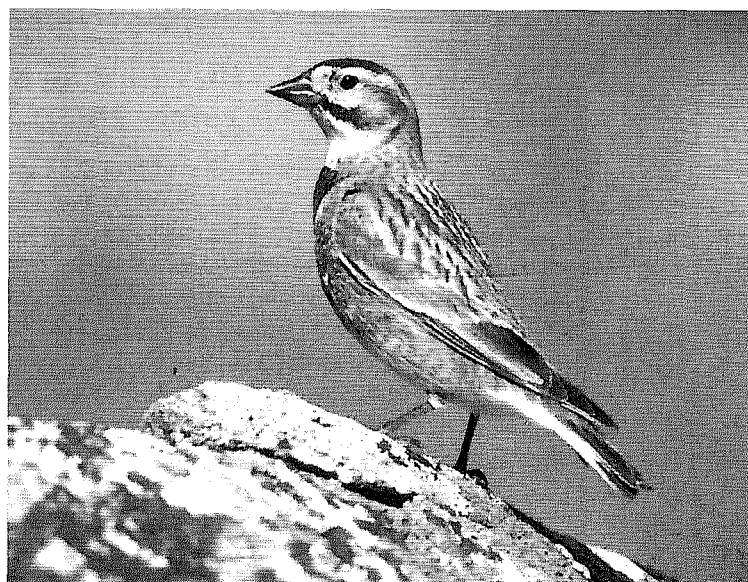
The Sharp-tailed Grouse dance was the most frenetic of all the "chickens" we had seen. The males crouched down with tail lifted, showing a big white ventral patch. They would scurry very fast in one direction, pirouette around several times, and then run back in the opposite direction. The females cruised aimlessly about. I hoped to get a better look as the sun came up and broke out of the clouds. But another bird tour showed up, and their group slipped in front of us further down the road. The grouse apparently didn't like this closer approach, and they retreated behind the ridgeline out of sight. When they finally emerged into visibility, they were far away on the next rise. And there were fewer of them.

This was a drawback to the increased popularity of the Colorado Chicken Run; the more birders, the fewer visible birds. This theme would be repeated down the road.

*To be continued next issue.*



*Dexter Kelly, long time birder and supporter of Los Angeles Audubon Society, is now LAAS President.*



*McCown's Longspur*

# WESTERN Tanager

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

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

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

PRESIDENT:  
Dexter Kelly  
1st VICE PRESIDENT:  
Garry George  
2nd VICE PRESIDENT:  
Becky Schweibert  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:  
position vacant  
RECORDING SECRETARY:  
Johanna Dawes  
TREASURER:  
Pat Heirs

Annual membership in both societies is  
\$35 per year and \$20 for new members  
for their first year. Members receive the  
*Western Tanager* newsletter and *Audubon*  
magazine, a national publication.  
LAAS Chapter Only memberships do not  
include *Audubon* magazine and are \$20,  
\$35, \$50, \$100, and \$250.

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

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

Plummer Park  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard  
West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

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

WesternTanager@LAAudubon.org – e-mail  
LAAS@LAAudubon.org – e-mail  
www.LAAudubon.org – website



Printed on Recycled Paper

## Message from the President:

### What's Happening – What Isn't! And how you can help.

Earlier this year I put out the word that we had to find a new headquarters. We got a response almost immediately, with one member offering space for rental, and another volunteering his time and expertise as a realtor to help us find promising properties. Since then, we've checked out a number of sites, and found at least one that might serve well. But choosing the right location has become more difficult, as we more clearly determine the potential costs and the limitations of our finances. It's hard to even decide what kind of location would be best for public access and membership services, as well as our main educational mission. For this and other strategic decisions, we need expert advice. Maybe you could help us.

Although the Los Angeles Audubon Society is a nonprofit charitable and educational institution, running it requires skills that are needed for a small business. This is especially true where the bookstore is concerned. We have dedicated, resourceful paid staff that have done a great job keeping the society functioning efficiently, but we need someone who can oversee all of the society's day-to-day operations and make the strategic decisions that help us do well financially, someone who possesses business skills and experience,

preferably in retail. That person would be our Executive Secretary.

At present, this position has not been filled. Potential volunteers for it may be put off by the threat of endless toil and stress. But the job does not entail a heavy workload; our paid staff takes care of the day-to-day responsibilities. What it requires is not so much time as expertise in business planning, especially retail. Most of us on the board have had experience in business, but not in retail. We need someone who can give advice on what location would be best for our bookstore as well as our other activities, and how the bookstore could be run more profitably. And, ultimately, what location would best serve our Los Angeles community.

We always need both the time and expertise of our members. But now the need for business-type skills is more urgent than ever. If you have business and management experience, and can spare a few hours a month, you could be of great help to the Society and its cause. Please let us hear from you! Contact us at [education@laaudubon.org](mailto:education@laaudubon.org) or call us at (323) 876-0202.

Thanks for your help!

-Dexter Kelly

## Central Valley Birding Symposium November 18-21, 2004

The Central Valley Bird Club will host the Eighth Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium Nov. 18-21, 2004 at the Radisson Hotel in Stockton, CA.

There will be field trips, workshops, and a Birding Nature Fair and Art Show with more than 25 vendors selling nature-related items. Keynote speakers: TV nature series host John Acorn, Graham Chisholm of the Nature Conservancy, and Ed Harper and his always impressive bird photos. Two of the many workshops are "Flycatcher ID" by Jon Dunn and "Owls Demystified" by Joe Morlan.

There are some new speakers and field trips this year, so those of you who have attended our festival before will have new offerings to enjoy. If you've never attended before, come see what you've been missing!

The schedule, brochure, registration form, etc. are on the website: [cvbs.org](http://cvbs.org)  
The non-computer inclined can contact Frances Oliver at (209) 369-2010.

# NEW AT THE BOOKSTORE

## HOLIDAY GIFT SUGGESTIONS

### For Budding Birders and Naturalists

*Nature's Yucky! Gross Stuff that Helps Nature Work* – uses kids' fascination with the stinky, the gross, and the icky to learn about wild animals, from Bald Eagles to Gray Wolves. \$10.00

*The Icky Bug Counting Book* – Learn to count from Zero to Twenty-six, bug by bug. \$6.95

*Owl Puke* – How one owl pellet reveals an owl's circle of life. Includes book, genuine owl pellet, bone sorting tray. \$13.95

*Woods Walk* – This information-packed guide shows what you'll see, hear and smell in woodlands, season by season. Beautifully illustrated, it's also useful as a field guide to common flora and fauna. \$14.95

### Gifts under \$10.00

*LensPen* – Compact, easy-to-use lens cleaning instrument for binoculars, cameras, camcorders. Safe cleaning compound will not spill or dry. \$8.75

*DigiKlear* – Self-replenishing cleaning system for digital cameras, cell phones. Safe for fragile digital displays, outperforms all other devices. \$9.00

*MagniMark* – Clear acrylic page magnifier with six inch ruler that enlarges fine print or other details; great for map reading, stamp and coin collecting. A perfect bookmark. \$2.25

*Audubon Bird Call* – Twist and create a variety of sounds to call in those skulking birds. With reasonable care, will last forever. \$6.00

*Nature's Charms Enameled Pins* – Decorate your vest or hat with one or many of this wide assortment of favorite birds, butterflies, dragonflies. Only \$3.99

### Gifts under \$25.00

*Optics First Aid Kit* for binoculars, 'scopes, film and digital cameras, camcorders. Includes StaticWick™ brush, cleaning solution, anti-static cloth, SpeckGRABBER™ \$11.95

*Rain Gauge* – Choose from Dragonfly, Hummingbird, or Rooster with Weathervane. Verdigris and gold finish with glass measuring vial. \$12.50

*Birder's Life List & Diary*, Third Edition. Species listing of 757 birds found in North America north of Mexico, plus Hawaiian Islands. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. \$14.95

*Songbird Portraits* – Relax and enjoy this amazing medley of avian solos and choruses, just as they occurred in nature. No narration. Compact disc. \$15.95

*Hooked on Hummingbirds VHS*– Spectacular film of 20 hummingbird species in U.S. and Costa Rica shot close-up in slow motion, stop motion. Shows hummers flying, feeding, fighting, nesting, hummingbird aerobatics. 53 minutes. \$22.99

## HOLIDAY HOURS

The Bookstore and Audubon House will be closed during the holiday season on the following days:

Thursday, November 25 - Thanksgiving Day

Friday, December 2 - Christmas Eve

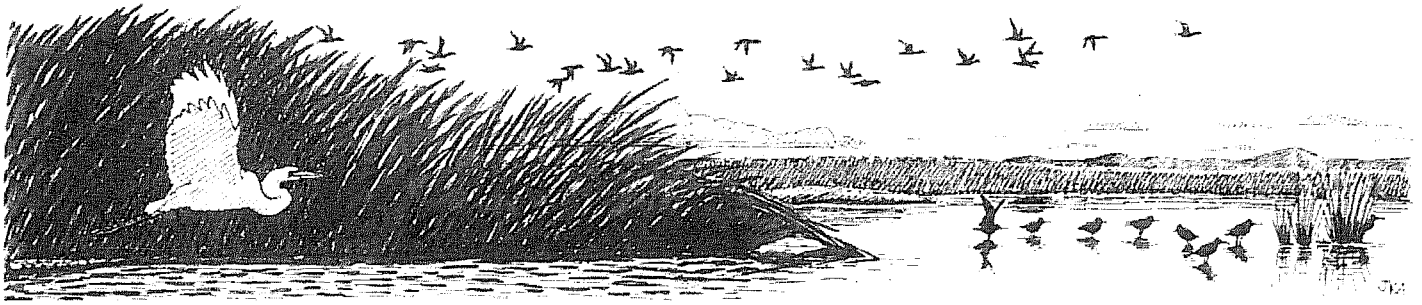
Saturday, December 25 - Christmas Day

Friday, December 31 - New Year's Eve

Saturday, January 1 - New Year's Day

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!





# CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

by Garry George

**C**alifornia Corporate Law as well as Federal 501(c) 3 tax-exempt status rules and regulations prohibit non-profits like L.A. Audubon Society from campaigning for or endorsing political candidates. By election day, environmental issues and positions have been so massaged by campaign managers and candidates to attract voters from the middle that it is hard to tell where the candidates actually stand.

Los Angeles Audubon Society says that actions speak louder than words and we urge you to look at voting records and policy decisions of the candidates before you entrust them with your air, water, parks, and other natural resources.

Here are two fantastic resources to visit before you vote:

The League of Conservation Voters in Washington, DC, (LCV), (202) 785-8683 or — [www.lcv.org/fedfocus/fedfocusmain.cfm](http://www.lcv.org/fedfocus/fedfocusmain.cfm) is “committed to holding Congress and the White House accountable for their environmental actions. From Cabinet appointments to environmental legislation, our federal officials have the power to decide our environmental future.” LCV identifies the key national political/environmental issues, such as the *2003/2004 Energy Bill*, facing Americans who care about their environment. And . . .

The California League of Conservation Voters (CLCV), (310) 441-4162, or—[www.ecovote.org](http://www.ecovote.org), in Los Angeles, publishes the California Environmental Scorecard, for thirty years the definitive barometer of environmental politics in Sacramento. You can also check the records of your representatives by zip code. They conduct

rigorous research on candidates in order to make endorsements in key races. They campaign in Sacramento, with other organizations, for strong environmental legislation on legislation of importance to the greater environmental community. The CLCV endorses candidates on their website based on their environmental voting records.

## **Mercury emissions from power plants:**

Did you know that prior administration EPAs estimated that a 90% cut in electric utility mercury air emissions was achievable by 2008, the level the Clean Air Act requires? The current EPA on January 30, 2004 issued a new rule requiring only a 50%-70% reduction by 2018, ten years later.

## **Toxic pollution and cleanup:**

Did you know that the Superfund created by Congress on a “polluter pays” funding basis expired in 1995 and since then the cost of cleaning up toxic spills has shifted to the taxpayer?

## **Clean Water:**

Did you know that California’s wetlands, rivers, and streams are still unprotected since the Bush Administration removed federal protections in 2003 and the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee of the California Assembly defeated Audubon California SB1477, the Clean Water Bill?

## **Climate Change:**

Did you know that The McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship Act to address global warming was defeated 55-43 in the Senate in October, 2003?


## **Protecting the Arctic National Refuge:**

Did you know that HR4529 permitting oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is making its way through the House of Representatives? It was introduced by Rep. Richard Pombo of California’s Eleventh District.

## **Department of Defense Readiness and Range Preservation Initiative:**

Did you know that in 2003, as part of the Defense Authorization Bill, Congress voted to exempt the Department of Defense from most requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)? The Congress is now beginning to consider exemptions to the hazardous waste laws (RCRA and CERCLA) and the Clean Air Act as well.

## **Clean Air:**

Did you know that in December, 2003 a federal appeals court blocked Bush Administration changes to the Clean Air Act program that would have made it easier for older refineries, utilities, and other industrial facilities to make repairs without installing pollution control systems? 

**L.A. Audubon  
urges you to  
VOTE!**

## Dr. Robert Ridgely makes rare visit to southern California

**Saturday, March 19, 2005, 7 PM**  
**Los Angeles County**  
**Museum of Natural History Auditorium**  
**900 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles**

Dr. Ridgely received his Ph.D. from Yale University and is a leading ornithologist in the study of endemic and endangered species of birds in the Americas. He is the author of *Birds Of Panama* (first edition 1976, revised 1989), *Birds Of South America Vols I (1989) & II (1994)*, and *Birds Of Ecuador* (2001). In 1997, he discovered a new species of bird, Jocotoco Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*), which was named after him. In 1998 Dr. Ridgely founded the Jocotoco Foundation that has created and sustained six habitat reserves in Ecuador. Dr. Ridgely serves on many conservation boards and is currently International Vice-President of the American Bird Conservancy.

Dr. Ridgely will be introduced by Kimball Garrett,

Ornithology Collections Manager of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History

Following Dr. Ridgely's presentation there will be a reception (included in the cost of the ticket) catered by Wolfgang Puck in the Museum's Grand Foyer. Fruit, cheese, cookies, and coffee will be served with a cash bar serving wine, beer and soft drinks (\$7).

Dr. Ridgely will sign books at this event. In advance of the presentation, his books will be available for sale at the Natural History Museum bookstore and Los Angeles Audubon bookstore (323) 876-0202).

Tickets are \$50, partly tax-deductible for most donors, and benefits participating southern California Chapters of Audubon and the Jocotoco Foundation.

Garry George – [garrygeorge@laaudubon.org](mailto:garrygeorge@laaudubon.org) and Cat Waters – [robcatwaters@earthlink.net](mailto:robcatwaters@earthlink.net), are volunteering their time to produce this event.

For more information visit [www.laaudubon.org](http://www.laaudubon.org) or contact the producers.

## LAAS INTERNATIONAL TOURS

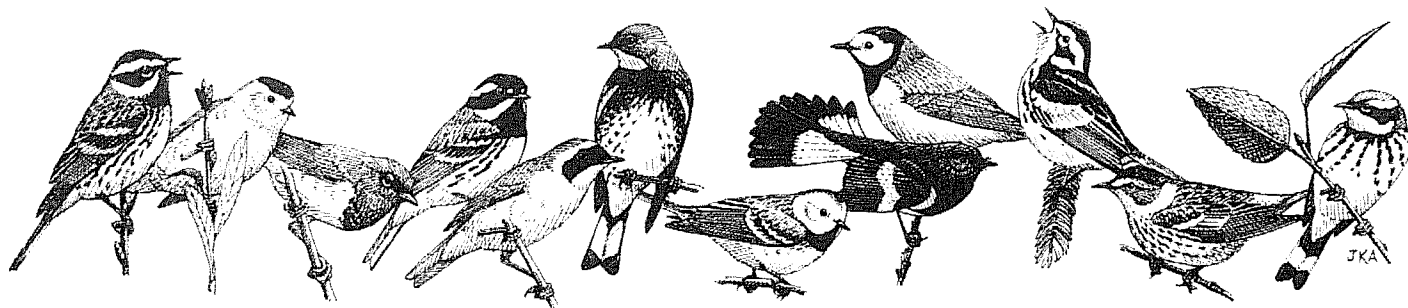
### **THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS** **January 28 – February 7, 2005**

If the Galapagos is on your list of places that you long to visit, you will not be disappointed in this trip. The desert islands harbor birds, animals and plants, some not found anywhere else in the world. Walk near nesting boobies, storm-petrels, frigatebirds, and albatrosses. See Darwin Finches and mockingbirds so tame they may land at your feet. Your 20 passenger motor yacht is equipped with all the modern amenities. Space will be limited to 10 participants.

### **THE BEST OF COSTA RICA** **February 24 – March 8, 2005**

This is a repeat of our highly successful 2004 trip to Costa Rica where we enjoyed spectacular scenery and recorded over 400 species of birds at a reasonable pace. Accommodations are first class with good food, while being accompanied by excellent, experienced guides and leaders. Join us for this unforgettable adventure in a remarkably diverse, small country.

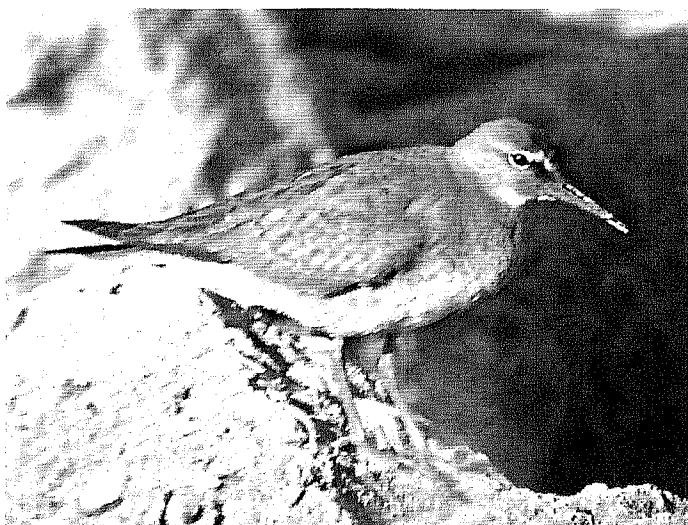
For information and itinerary, contact:  
Olga Clarke, Travel Director, Los Angeles Audubon Society  
Ph/Fax: (818) 249-9511 e-mail: [oclarketravel@earthlink.net](mailto:oclarketravel@earthlink.net)



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Jon Feenstra

It just so happens that some of the hottest days here in southern California are also some of the most exciting – especially if you agree with me and find the pinnacle of birding to be looking at little grayish birds that walk around in the mud. 'Tis the season for shorebirds and we had a pretty exciting run of them. But that's not entirely fair, because we had a pretty good run of other stuff, too – summering eastern strays, early fall passerines, and a few other random goodies. This season's weather was warm as expected in summer but cooler than usual, with only a few days in September where it was spontaneous-combustion warm. Coastally and on the L.A. River, it was totally pleasant with cool overcast mornings. The Antelope Valley, however, was hot and dry. Consequently, much of the mud at the Piute Ponds was dust and shorebirds were more concentrated at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds where water levels are more constant.



Wandering Tattler. Piute Ponds. Photo by Mike San Miguel.

A **Golden-Plover**, believed to be Pacific, was seen on the L.A. River from DeForest Park September 3 [RS]. A juvenile **Wandering Tattler**, casual away from the coast, was found at the Piute Ponds on August 17 [TMc, MSM] and still present on August 28 [JF, JS, MS]. It was studied carefully and heard calling, ruling out the other species of tattler that has once strayed to the Antelope Valley. The first **Solitary Sandpipers** popped up in the Antelope Valley with a fly-by at the Piute Ponds on July 25 [MSM, JF] and an adult at the G-Spot in Lancaster on August 7 [JF]. Solitary Sandpipers were in the area with a constant supply along the L.A. River beginning August 13 [RB]. The numbers peaked on August 28 with six juvenile birds [AL]. The latest report was of one away from the L.A. River at Peck Road Park in Arcadia on September 14 [AL]. The slightly narrower window for **Semipalmated Sandpipers** opened twice. The first opening was just for an adult at the Piute Ponds on July 21

[TMc, MSM]. The serious opening that blasted us with a veritable blizzard of these little peeps began July 30 at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds with the first juvenile [JF]. The next day the first one appeared on the L.A. River [RB, KL]. Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers were present there during most of August in numbers –

about 10 were seen around August 15 [RB, JF, KL, MSM]. The Semipalmated window closed on September 4 with the last report from the L.A. River [KL].

**Baird's Sandpipers** are around at about the same time as the Semipalmateds. Sure enough, the first adult was seen at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds on July 21 [TMc, MSM] and the first juvenile was on the L.A. River on July 31 [RB, KL]. The number peaked there on August 22 with 7-8 juveniles [RB, TW]. Baird's Sandpipers hang around a little later than the Semipalmateds do; four were on the L.A. River on September 4 [RB, SK, KL] and singles were at the L.A. River [RB] and the Lancaster Sewage Ponds [DH] on September 10. The last of our rare-but-regular shorebirds, **Pectoral**

**R**ecords 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.

To report birds, send observations with as many details as possible to:

*Birds of the Season,*  
Jon Feenstra at [feenstra@jts.caltech.edu](mailto:feenstra@jts.caltech.edu)

*North American Birds, L.A. 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](mailto:kgarrett@nhm.org)

*California Bird Records Committee*  
Guy McCaskie  
P.O. Box 275  
Imperial Beach, CA 91933-0275  
e-mail: [guymcc@pacbell.net](mailto:guymcc@pacbell.net)

To report birds for the tape, call:

Jon Fisher: (818) 544-5009 (work)  
e-mail: [JonF60@hotmail.com](mailto:JonF60@hotmail.com)



**Sandpiper**, first arrived on the L.A. River on August 23 [JG]. Although the last report from there was four birds on September 12 [DK] their window of occurrence will remain open into October. The shorebird of the season was a juvenile **Ruff** on the L.A. River in Paramount found on September 10 [RB] and last reported three days later. [MB].

Well, there are other birds besides shorebirds, right? An immature **Little Blue Heron** popped up at Malibu Lagoon on August 23 [DN] and remained there at least until September 12 [JG]. It was completely white except for a few blue-gray smudges on its primary feathers. A basic plumaged **Bonaparte's Gull** was at the Lancaster Sewage Ponds from July 30 to August 7 [JF]. **White-winged Doves** were reported from Madrona Marsh on August 21 [DM] and Sand Dune Park on September 2 [RB]. A migrant **Bell's Vireo** was at Sand Dune Park August 24 -27 [KL] and another one was singing at DeForest Park from August 7 to September 4 [KL, SK]. A female **Purple Martin** was hanging out along the L.A. River by DeForest Park for an amazing few days from August 20 to September 4 [RB, KL, TW]. Although **Bank Swallows** are regular at the Piute Ponds in the Antelope Valley, they are rather rare down here in the basin. One was at Ballona Freshwater Marsh on August 4 [DC]. Other sightings were



*Northern Parula. Eaton Canyon.  
Photo by Mark Scheel*


along the L.A. River on August 19 [JF] and 28 [AL] and at Harbor Park on August 22 [CS] and 28 [KL]. A fall migrant **Sage Thrasher** was at the Piute Ponds on August 13 [MSM]. Also there on the same day was the first **Virginia's Warbler** of the season [MSM].

Two more Virginia's were found later – one at Sand Dune Park on August 27 and another at DeForest Park on September 4 [KL]. **Northern Parulas** summered at two locations in L.A. County this season; a pair at Harbor Park [KL] and a lone male at Eaton Canyon [JF]. A ratty Parula was seen at Harbor Park on August 28 and may have been the molting female or a juvenile [KL]. A **Blackpoll Warbler** was at Peck Road Park in Arcadia on September 12 [AL]. A female **American Redstart** popped into Sand Dune Park for September 3 and 4 [LC, MC, KL]. **Indigo Buntings** put on a great show this summer. The pair that arrived in Eaton Canyon in June remained there through August 14. On July 31 when southbound bunting movement was in full swing, 3-4 males and two juveniles were present. Two males were present on August 8. The juveniles were not confirmed as products of a local nesting. [JF] In addition to those Indigo Buntings, a molting male was seen at Harbor Park on August 29 [KL]. Other buntings, namely **Painted Buntings**, appeared twice: one at George F Canyon on the Palos Verdes Peninsula on July 25 [AR] and a second one at Sepulveda Basin on August 7 [BK]. Both birds were adult males. Although typically passed off as escapees, these sightings do coincide within the time that a true vagrant Painted Bunting would be expected. The first **Bobolink** of the fall was sighted in the L.A. River in Sepulveda Basin on September 4 [JFi].



*Little Blue Heron. Malibu Lagoon. Photo by Jon Feenstra.*

Sightings from San Clemente Island this season included an early male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on August 16 and two **Solitary Sandpipers** on August 17. A **Masked Booby** continues to hang around the island taunting us mainland bound birders.[BS]

The best of the shorebirding has passed, that means it's a good time to rest the scope eye until spring when they come back. With cooler weather and the peak of fall migration of passerines, the coastal migrant traps will be the places to be. 

[RB] = Richard Barth  
[MB] = Martin Byhower  
[LC] = Lori Conrad  
[MC] = Mark Conrad  
[DC] = Dan Cooper  
[JF] = Jon Feenstra  
[JFi] = Jon Fisher  
[JG] = John Green  
[DH] = Denise Hamilton  
[BK] = Bob Kaufman  
[DK] = Doug Karlun  
[SK] = Sandy Koonce  
[KL] = Kevin Larson  
[AL] = Andrew Lee  
[TMc] = Todd McGrath  
[DM] = Dave Moody  
[DN] = Dick Norton  
[AR] = Anke Raue  
[MSM] = Mike San Miguel  
[JS] = Janet Scheel  
[MS] = Mark Scheel  
[CS] = Carol Selvey  
[RS] = Rich Sonnenberg  
[BS] = Brian Sullivan  
[TW] = Tom Wurster

# 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, October 30 – Oxnard Plains.** Leaders **Nick & Mary Freeman**. Meet at the Hueneme sod fields at 8:00 AM. There may be vagrants to chase. Mugu estuary, Sycamore Canyon, and Saticoy settling ponds are also possibilities. From the 101 N, drive S on Las Posas Rd., then turn Rt. onto Hueneme Rd. Meet on the N side of Hueneme Rd. about one mile W of PCH, and just before Casper Rd. Bird until we see all the birds. 'Scopes helpful.

**Sunday, November 7 – Topanga State Park.** **Ken Wheeland** and **Chris Tosdevin** will lead participants through this beautiful and 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 AM.

**Sunday, November 7 – Photoshop Lecture.** Speaker: **Tom Stephenson**. See details on next page

**Saturday, November 13 – Newport Back Bay.** Leader **Mary Freeman**. Meet on the boardwalk along the NW bay at the "Sharp-tailed Spot" at the end of the boardwalk, for a 6.6 ft. high tide. Rails, California Gnatcatcher, and sparrows will be target birds. Take the 405 Fwy S to the 73 Toll Road (free this far) to the Campus Dr. exit, which becomes Bristol St. Turn right on Irvine Ave., drive 1.4 miles, then turn left on a small street called University Drive. Park at the end, walk down the hill, over the bridge, and to the end of the boardwalk. Meet here at 8:00 AM (high tide) for a full day in the area. Bring lunch. 'Scopes helpful.

**Sunday, November 14 – 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 suggested donation. Meet at 8:15 AM.

## 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

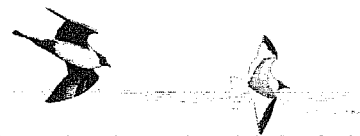
If there is insufficient response, the trip will be cancelled two Wednesdays prior to the scheduled date (four weeks for pelagics). You will be so notified and your fee returned. Your cancellation after that time will bring a refund only if there is a paid replacement. Millie Newton is available at Audubon House on Wednesdays from noon to 4:00 PM. to answer questions about field trips. Our office staff is also available Tuesday through Saturday for most reservation services.

## REFUND POLICY FOR PELAGIC TRIPS

If a participant cancels 31 days or more prior to departure, a \$4 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.*

**Saturday, November 20 – Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.** Leaders: **Ann & 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 parking fee), turn left (leading to the "Olympic Forest") and park in the first available spaces. Meet at 8:00 AM.



**Saturday, November 20 – Ventura Harbor** toward and past **San Miguel Island** on the fast catamaran M/V Islander. Nine-hour trip departs from the Island Packers dock in the Ventura Harbor at 8:00 AM and returns around 5:00 PM. After dropping off campers on Santa Cruz Island we will have the boat to ourselves and head toward 1000 fathom water about 10 miles from San Miguel Island. Birds seen this time of year: Northern Fulmar; Black-vented, Pink-footed, and Sooty shearwaters; Leach's Storm-Petrel; South Polar Skua; Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; rocky shorebirds (up to 5); Common Murre; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Occasionally: Craveri's Murrelet. Rarities: Buller's and Flesh-footed shearwaters; Black-footed Albatross. Leaders: **Todd McGrath, David Pereksta, Michael San Miguel, Jr., and Jonathan Feenstra**. \$95 – Snack type galley with hot dogs, sandwiches, pizza and drinks available.

**Sunday, November 21 –**  
**Ballona Wetlands.** **Connie Day** will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland. Shorebirds will be numerous. 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 AM.

**Saturday, November 27 –**  
**West Antelope Valley Raptors** and other wintering birds. **Jean Brandt** will lead us from Quail Lake east across the Antelope Valley. Ferruginous Hawk guaranteed (almost). Wear warm clothing, bring lunch, and have a full tank of gas. Meet at Denny's at 6:45 AM to carpool. Take 405N to Roxford in Sylmar. Turn right, then right into the Denny's parking lot. Trip leaves at 7:00 AM. 'Scopes and FRS radios helpful.

**Sunday, December 5 –**  
**Topanga State Park.** Leaders: **Ken Wheeland** and **Chris Tosdevin**. See November 7 listing for details. Meet at 8:00 AM.

**Sunday, December 12 –**  
**Whittier Narrows.** Leader: **Ray Jillson**. See November 14 listing for details. Meet at 8:15 AM.

**Saturday, December 18 –**  
**Lancaster Christmas Count.** Contact compiler **Nick Freeman** if you want a chance to see Rough-legged Hawk, longspurs, Mountain Plover, Common Raven (somewhat more likely) in this fairly agricultural corner of the county. Network and reacquaint at lunch, and chase or visit Piute Ponds afterwards, as time permits. Contact Nick at: (818) 247-6172 or mnffreeman@earthlink.net

**Saturday, December 18 –**  
**Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.** Leaders: **Ann & 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 parking fee), turn left (leading to the "Olympic Forest") and park in the first available spaces. Meet at 8:00 AM.

**Sunday, December 19 –**  
**Malibu Christmas Count.** Contact compiler **Larry Allen** to participate in this well-attended and impressively productive count. Included in count blocks are oak and sycamore-lined canyons and shoreline. Call Larry: (323) 221-2022 or e-mail: larry.w.allen@californialink.net.

**Sunday, January 2 –**  
**Los Angeles Christmas Count.** Contact compiler **Raymond Schep** for information. (323) 773 6441 x106 or e-mail Rayoohoo@yahoo.com

**Saturday, January 8 –**  
**East Antelope Valley.** Leaders: **Jerry Dunn** and **Scott Harris**. The far northeast corner of L.A. County is uncharted territory for all but a few birders. However, Scott has DFG oversight of this area, and Jerry lives here; so they know that Mountain Plover, raptors, LeConte's Thrasher and other AV specialties are often easier to find in the far eastern reaches of the Valley. Take Hwy 14 N to Avenue S (next to Lake Palmdale). Drive into the Park-and-Ride just to the east. Meet at 8:00 AM at the W end of the lot. Bring lunch for a full day of fun in the field. No fee, no reservation. 'Scopes and FRS radios helpful.

**Saturday-Sunday, January 29-30 –**  
**Salton Sea.** Leader: **Nick Freeman**. Yellow-footed Gull, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Stilt Sandpiper all hopeful. Fee: \$5. No limit, but sign up with SASE for more details. Meet at 7:30 AM. Saturday. More details in January newsletter and in SASE flyer.

## Adobe Photoshop Workshop

presented by **Tom Stephenson**  
**Sunday, November 7, 2004**

**10:30 AM - 4:30 PM**

**Eaton Canyon Nature Center**  
1750 N. Altadena Drive, Pasadena

Back by popular demand, Tom will have even more time to go over the basics of Photoshop and beyond. As an accomplished international birder, Tom will demonstrate tips and tricks on his own bird and travel photos. The six hour workshop will cover everything you need to know to touch up your digital photos or scans; crafting fair pictures into good, and good pictures into masterpieces. Topics covered will include an overview of Photoshop basics such as how to make selections, crop, rotate, and resize your pictures; and more advanced techniques such as how to use *Levels* and other tools for correcting exposure; an overview of *Layers* and *Layer Masks*; how to remove unwanted distractions from a picture; how and when to sharpen your picture; what to consider when printing photos; a selection of "Quick Keys" and navigational tips ease and efficiently; and a discussion of color and color correction.

Get more out of the session! Bring your (optional) portable computer loaded with Adobe Photoshop. (A CD drive will allow us to load files that we can work on together.) Tom goes slowly, answers questions, and addresses areas of particular interest to attendees. For the curious and the serious. This workshop is geared towards anyone who owns a digital camera and Adobe Photoshop or comparable graphics manipulation software. Fee: \$20. Send your check and SASE to LAAS now!

We expect to sell out early.

# EVENING MEETINGS

Meet at 7:30 PM in Plummer Park  
7377 Santa Monica Boulevard West Hollywood, CA 90046-6694

Tuesday, November 9

Herb and Olga Clarke  
Baja Adventure

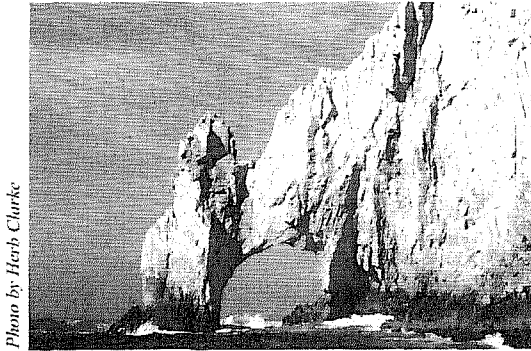


Photo by Herb Clarke

In April this year, Herb and Olga Clarke, along with Larry Sansone, drove to the tip of Baja California and back. Herb took many photos of the unique flora and fauna and scenes of this interesting peninsula. Come join us in viewing some of the highlights of our marvelous southern neighbor.

Tuesday, December 13

Jim Clements  
It's All In The Family



Jim Clements will present an overview of the interesting and diverse bird families into which the 10,000 species of birds of the world fall. His talk will be illustrated with his superb photographs taken during visits he has made to 132 countries over a half century of dedication to conservation issues in general and birding in particular. Jim is best known as the author of *Birds of the World: A Checklist*. This monumental work, now in its fifth edition, is a compilation of the 10,000 species of birds of the world, their range, and over 20,000 subspecies. He is also the senior author of *A Field Guide to the Birds of Peru*.

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

DATED MATERIAL  
Please Expedite

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

V  
O  
T  
E