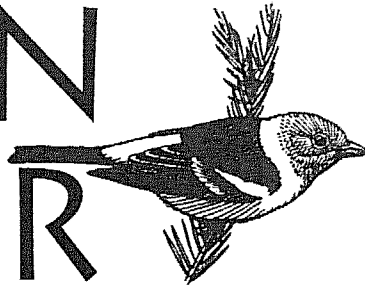


# WESTERN TANAGER



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## An Interview with Robert Ridgely

by Garry George

Central American birding became less confusing with the publication of *Birds of Panama* in 1976. And anyone who birded in South America before the publication of Robert Ridgely and Guy Tudor's *Birds of South America*, Volumes I (1989) and II (1994) remembers how overwhelmed they were by the incredible numbers of species of birds and the new families of furnariids, antbirds, and tanagers. With the publication of those two volumes, we calmed down a little and were finally able to study before a trip, and copy, cut and paste plates and text from those unwieldy volumes to take into the field. With the publication of *Birds of Ecuador* (2001) we had our field guide. Thanks to Bob Ridgely, we finally got a handle on birds of the Neotropics. And when, in 1997, he discovered a new species of antpitta that was eventually named for him, he was rewarded for all his research, study, and writing about Neotropical birds.

Dr. Ridgely is speaking in Los Angeles on March 19, 2005 to benefit five southern California Audubon chapters (L.A., Palos Verdes/South Bay, Pasadena, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Monica Bay) and his Jocotoco Foundation in Ecuador. It promises to be an interesting evening with a reception afterwards. Tickets are \$50 (tax deductible) and can be obtained by mailing a SASE to "Ridgely in SoCal", LAAS, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd, L.A. 90046.

This interview is meant to introduce Dr. Ridgely to the readers, and to cover

some background and topics that won't be covered in his talk which will focus on the story of his discovery of the Jocotoco Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*) and how that discovery changed the face of conservation of Neotropical birds.

**GG:** How did you first get into birds?

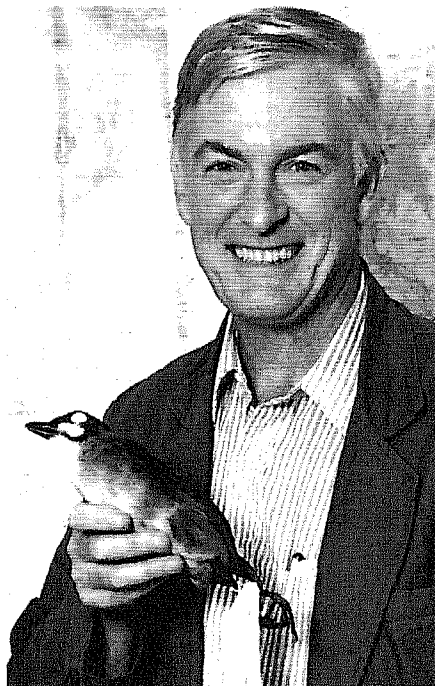
**RR:** Actually I've been interested in birds virtually all my life. My very earliest memories are of birds and I think clearly the impetus for that came from my father, Beverly Ridgely, who was a French professor and an amateur birder,

a very competent amateur birder. We grew up with bird feeders around the house and shrubs and so forth. One of my very earliest experiences with birds that I can remember, goes back to when I was five years old. The New Jersey turnpike had just been opened in the late 1950s and my father stopped because he wanted to look at a hawk and I was sitting in the back seat and peered out at the hawk. It was in the wintertime. Behind us came this cop and he wanted to know what in heavens name we were doing. This was on the New Jersey meadowland back when it was still a pretty good marsh.

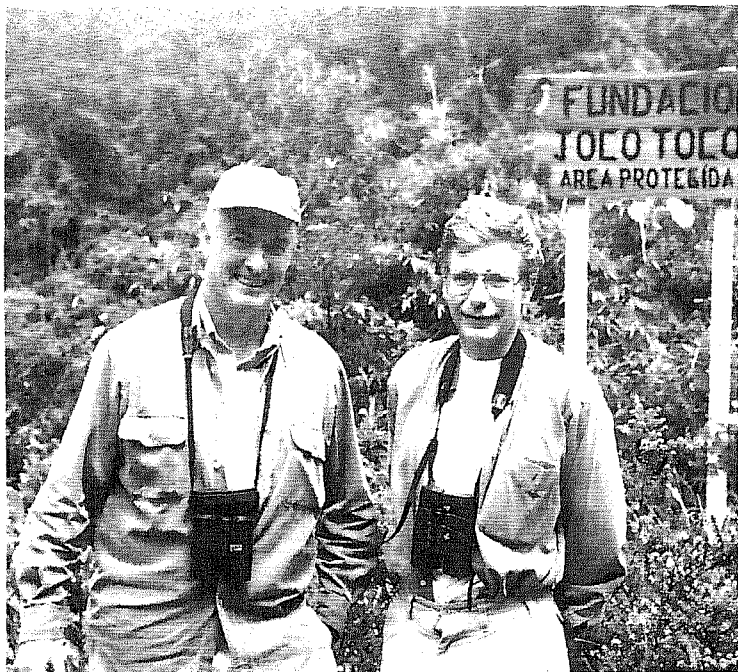
The very first bird I remember was when I was a boy looking out of the dining room window and there was a flock of Cedar Waxwings. That's always been one of my favorite birds. I became a birder, just on the side, as a schoolboy back in 1954 when I was eight years old and I pretty much kept a year list ever since then, although it's pretty complicated now with all the traveling. I'm not listing very much anymore but I keep a pretty careful northeastern list on my home turf. I've done that for years.

**GG:** How has birding changed your life?

**RR:** Well, not that it's changed my life but that it's really come to pretty well dominate my life. A more sane or more rational person would make that observation. The seminal event that changed everything occurred in the sixties.



Robert Ridgely—*Grallaria ridgelyi*



With Nigel Simpson, co-founder of Jocotoco

I was part of the Vietnam protest generation but I didn't really protest exactly. I ended up deciding I didn't want to stay in college. I was in Princeton and opted to be free. This was in 1966 in the midst of the Vietnam War and everything else. And of course I promptly got drafted and I thought anything's better than Vietnam. I ended up going to Officer Candidate School. And then I got sent to Panama in the middle of the Canal Zone and I was surrounded by tropical birds. The forest in the Canal Zone was fine so that's where I was exposed to tropical birding and that was a turning event in my life. No question.

Since then, I came back to college; I was all charged up and couldn't quite figure out what to do as a student again. I ended up shifting careers, took a few false steps, then ended up getting a degree in biology and making ornithology a career, which would never have happened other than the fact that the U.S. Army sent me to Panama. So that's how it's really changed my life. Beyond that, I wouldn't know where to begin. I'd say my life has ended up being pretty much dominated by birds professionally and so forth and I've had an interesting career. I've been involved in the serious scientific research side of things with the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia and gradually evolved away from that into the conservation field.

out there and it seems like it's almost a natural tendency by those who have a curiosity of natural history to always create a list and always try to figure out categories. And that's basically what you're doing with taxonomy.

There's been an extraordinary upsurge in interest in taxonomy in the last fifteen years. When I was in graduate school, taxonomy was the focus of hardly any scientists, almost nobody doing it, and certainly amateurs weren't interested in it at all on the bird level or anything else. Just the explosion of interest in taxonomy and how it's done really startles someone who's been around as long as I have and has as many white hairs growing on my head as I do. It's fascinating to me that people are as interested in taxonomy as they are because they certainly didn't use to be. Of course one of the reasons they are is because it determines what they can list. A lot of what taxonomists do, no matter what they say, does involve a certain level of subjectivity. Basically we've got a couple of different approaches and different fundamental attitudes about how to handle it and several different concepts of what actually makes for a species. And all that has led to the endlessly fascinating dialogue and diatribes between partisans on one side or the other that feel that things need to be absolute and you absolutely have to prove that things are one way or the

GG: OK. Let's talk a little bit about taxonomy. What do you really think is a species?

RR: This is a fascinating subject because it influences a lot of the way we handle the natural world. As human beings we like to have lists. We like to keep things organized in our minds. It's a complicated and incredibly diverse world

other and those that feel that there's a whole range and level of evidence that's out there and therefore the interpretation and experience needs and can have a higher level of confidence. So that's what we're up against here, especially with the genetic approach to bird taxonomy.

Everyone thought years ago Sibley & Monroe were going to revolutionize everything and stabilize it. But now it's become clear and most everyone would agree that even looking at the DNA and all the rest of it, that's also subject to interpretation. It's not really anywhere near as absolute a method as we thought it was going to be. So it seems that even using this approach has ended up being just merely another line of evidence towards how you interpret taxonomic range and in addition it brings up the whole issue of a new meaning now of allopatry and all the rest of it.

Basically, it strikes me that we're coming up to the situation where it's just going to get all more complicated and in flux and there's going to be additional ideas out there. I find it challenging and stimulating and a good thing. How do we know that Golden-hooded Tanager is a different species from a Masked Tanager? They are divided by the Andes and never going to make contact. Yeah, there are differences in plumages and patterns. But they're not really that different. How do we know they are different? The reason they are different right now is because we say they are different, that's all. And when the DNA studies get through, my guess is that they won't turn out to be that different. In any case the DNA expresses itself in many other ways than difference of color. It's a complicated subject and it's one that engages us all because we all keep lists.

I just finished working on the revision of the *Birds of South America*, Volumes I and II that I did with Guy Tudor and I've actually created a list of what I considered passerine bird species of South America. An awful lot of them. But it's my list. I think I have a good deal of experience at this sort of thing so it's a list that everybody probably will want to take seriously, but will it satisfy everybody? No. Obviously not. Any more than what other groups, other individuals, will come out with will necessarily satisfy me.

**GG:** Is that list going to be published in a revised edition?

**RR:** The book is going to be out next year, we hope. We're working with the University of Texas Press. It's a full revision of Volumes I and II with a substantial reduction of text. The book will be dealing with something like 2,200 species and will have a number of new images painted by Guy. So it's going to be out late next year or early 2006.

**GG:** Is it going to be one volume?

**RR:** One volume.

**GG:** And of course I have to ask the standard question. Where are III and IV?

**RR:** That was the constant question at the Bird Fair (in August in Rutland, UK) as we started to talk about books. Well, the short answer is that it's not being worked on now at all. But now that finally I've got the songbirds book done and finally I got the *Birds of Ecuador* done a couple of years ago, it actually is something we are talking about trying to put together. There's a limited number of projects I can handle at once but now that the songbirds have been put to bed, Texas Press is keen to do a Volume III and we've talked about how we would line up how we would handle the illustrations and I'm actually toying with bringing in additional authors. I would love to see it out. I would love for Guy to paint some of the paintings. He can't handle all of them but there are some groups that he adores like hummingbirds and toucans. So Volume III probably will start next year actually. With the planning stages for it and the mock-ups, I would guess it's going to be a number of years until we see Volume III appear.

Volume IV I just don't know. That one excites me less and I still see a great need for this sort of thing. I love Volumes I and II. I think they are handsome books and they serve a great purpose in highlighting the amount that we have learned about birds of that part of the Neotropics in the last couple of decades. And it really is extraordinary how much we know now compared to what we knew back in 1967. When I first showed up in Panama there was hardly anyone looking at birds

in the tropics and nobody knew anything about any of the birds in the tropics. There's been an extraordinary upsurge in tropical birds in the last four years, nothing short of phenomenal.

**GG:** Taxonomy changes used to be published first with lots of peer review. Now they appear in field guides and once they are published they're sometimes not accepted by taxonomists, and birders are being confused by the different names; there really isn't an actual set-in-stone process for identifying species, is there?

**RR:** There really isn't a set-in-stone process when you come right down to it and actually on a world level there is no body of individuals set out to do such a thing. It's a fairly audacious task to even think about doing, especially on the world level, much less on a more restrictive level. There are only two areas in the world that actually do have bodies of scientists who are charged with coming up with a list for their respective geographic areas. One of them of course is North America and the other is Australia. And Australia is pretty small and there they tend to be relatively conservative and some say rigorous. Everywhere else it is wide open in a sense. There is a tremendous amount of give and take amongst the various individuals scientific and otherwise who are working in this kind of field. I happen to feel it's more putting out information one way or the other regardless of whether there is "peer review" or not. Personally, I've been out of the scientific world enough now to recognize that the peer review process is not necessarily all it's cut out to be. It doesn't always elucidate quite as well as you'd think it would. It certainly results in a highly imbalanced taxonomy and the results of that are clear in the Neotropics with certain groups that have received the attention of scientific review.

There are two or three groups that have been split like mad in the Neotropics because they've received a lot of attention and other groups that are actually far more internally divergent than they

are that have not received the attention therefore they remain a single or a couple of species. The most blatant example has to be the *Scytalopus* tapaculos where on the basis of really quite limited evidence, they split the genus from originally about ten or twelve species to now something like forty or forty five species, almost all of them exceedingly similar morphologically and by voice, extremely close, they even respond to each other by song. It's all been accepted in scientific literature, but was it really judged totally rigorously? I question that. Another group that's been looked at very carefully and split quite widely is Slaty Antshrike. It was the subject of a couple of very good papers by the Islers. But again these birds are really close. Some of them respond to each other's voices. It's just a matter of how you are defining differences. And there's the case of the brush-finches. Again, very narrowly split and other groups have not been. If we split the *Atlapetes* brush-finches at the level they have been then surely, say, Ornate Antwrens and Warbling Antbirds ought to be split at the same level too and end up with three or four more antbirds, two or three or four Ornate Antwrens and



*Ecuador – the Andes*

two or three more Scale-backed Antbirds. Exactly where all of this is going to end I don't know. As I say, I find it endlessly fascinating and it's a great subject of conversation amongst birders and scientists alike. Will we ever reach unanimity? I don't think that's going to happen. I really don't. But to me this kind of dialogue is healthy; this process is engaging a lot of people.

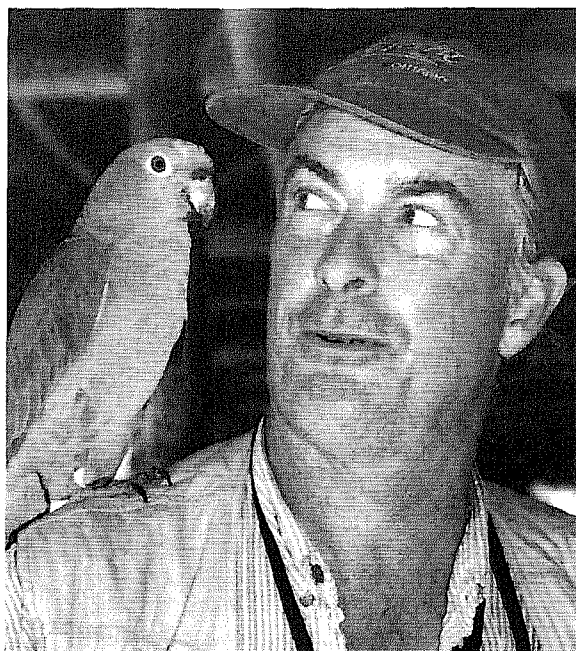
**RR:** On the subject of English names I do feel that we have somewhat lost our way. I'm probably going to be pilloried among some groups for saying these things publicly, but I'm going to say it anyway as far as English names are concerned. I think the English names in a sense are almost as contentious as species concept issues. People have lots of different ideas and so forth. Some people are very conservative and some people are always wanting to modify and always change. Certainly I would not count myself amongst the very conservative group. There are certain situations where obvious errors and omissions need rectifying. I'm also not anywhere near radical compared to what's going on in other continents. I think we've tried very hard to strike a happy medium between those who would advocate wholesale change in English bird names and staying absolutely rigid with the way it is.

**GG:** The english names are often conflicting with the South African ones.

**RR:** Absolutely. There are conflicting names that are equally accepted. It happens all along. The name that develops in England and the name that develops for the same bird in South Africa are not necessarily the same. So you're going to have a conflict.

With Africa there are huge differences with the so called Kenya school and the South African school. And how you resolve those is a matter of difficulty, but reasonable people can eventually come to agree and compromise. That was the rationale for the formation of the International Ornithological Conference about six or seven years ago. This committee that was supposed to come up with the official lists of English bird names.

Inevitably since the English bird names are attached to the species it sort of ended up that they were forced to consider what a species is and what it isn't upon the list. It became complicated and difficult and then the real complications where



*Ecuador – Yellow-crowned Parrot*

there are two or more names for what is judged to be the same species. Obviously, it happened a lot in South Africa but it also happened with equal opposites in Europe and England, and so Frank Gill (retired Director of Science for National Audubon) was charged with heading up this committee. I was working with Frank at that point; I was charged with the Neotropics. There was a whole series of geographical committees that were set up – one was Neotropic, one was Nearctic, and so forth. It went on and on around the world. Different groups of people got together and tried to thrash out what would be the name in that particular area and when there was a conflict you had to sort it out with Frank as the ultimate arbiter between the two groups. When there was a contrast between the Nearctic group and the Neotropical group you ended up having a compromise. Sometimes you won and sometimes you lost. That's reasonable and that's what ended up happening and that's why, with Frank as the arbiter between North America and England, it came to where we're not going to lose

loons but we are going to lose Common to Great Northern Diver and so on down the line. There were a series of compromises that we made back and forth. I was charged with the Neotropics and I had a number of people working with me,

for instance, who thought it was ludicrous to call the Yellow Rail "Yellow Rail". It's a crane. Every other rallid in the world that size with a short bill was called a crane, so we said it ought to be called Yellow Crane because it was called that in Mexico. Steve Howell was pushing for Yellow Crane. We all agreed that Yellow Crane is better but the Nearctic committee felt that it was mainly a North American bird and had always been Yellow Rail and we lost. We lost that one. But on the other hand we won some of the others. But where this is all going I don't know because the list isn't out yet. The *Myioborus* warbler genus has one primary member in the States, the Painted variety. There is a whole series of others in the tropics, and the big issue is whether they should be called redstarts or whitestarts. We got into this discussion. I don't

know where the word "whitestart" first started being used. It was about thirty years ago when it started coming out in some works. Guy and I were old enough or conservative enough we decided in Volume I not to use it. But it started getting used everywhere like in the Latin American warbler book by John Curson and others so we were finally persuaded that whitestart is the way to go and we've convinced the Nearctic committee. Basically you can't have fourteen species called whitestart and one species called redstart up here, so the Nearctic people are coming around to calling the bird whitestart. I should emphasize that the Nearctic Committee of the IOC is not the same body as the AOU committee on nomenclature and classification. The AOU is studiously resisting going over to this kind of thing. The AOU is pretty conservative on this kind of thing. I think too conservative personally.

**GG:** Let's talk a little about Neotropics and conservation. Why should Californians care about Neotropical species other than their own migrants that spend time down

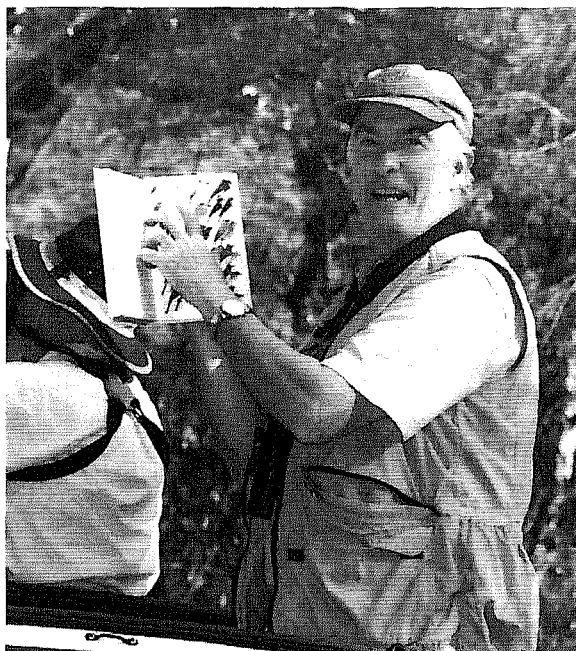
there? Are you going to include our migrants in your talk?

**RR:** Yes, to some extent I will but I think we have to be honest and realistic. There really aren't very many. There are a lot of shorebirds and so forth that are supposed to be "our" species, California species, but for the most part on the passerine front I'm sure almost everybody in the audience will be aware that virtually all the western passerines don't migrate all the way to South America. Very, very few of them do. Western Wood-Pewee is one major exception to that rule. There are a few others but not many. My rationale for this is that really everything is important. We need to be concerned about the world as a whole and the extraordinary biodiversity levels that we see everywhere, not just in our own backyard. That it's all part of creation and that it's all pretty wonderful and therefore we need to care about it all.

Now it's our very nature that everyone always has an orientation and bias toward their home turf wherever that might be. We care deeply about what's around us because we see it all the time. I care tremendously about what I am looking at out the window here, a beautiful marsh. It's freezing up and it's going to snow tonight and it's a wonderful place. It's fabulous because it's a New Hampshire Audubon Society sanctuary. That's why I decided to buy the house right across the street from it. I'm deeply concerned given the levels of biodiversity here that there's some threats that they face and I am concerned about protecting this rather small sanctuary of about 260 odd acres that we want to spend another couple hundred thousand dollars to expand it as a couple of parcels just came on the market. I know a couple of hundred thousand dollars could protect a lot more biodiversity that's at greater risk in a country like Ecuador or Mexico but because I live here inevitably I've got a bias for it. We all have that.

At the same time as having it, I therefore can't criticize and I don't, even though I will always use it as an example, spending millions or tens or even

hundreds of millions of dollars to buy a few hundred acres around some lagoon in southern California. That seems kind of crazy when you think what that kind of money could do elsewhere but we have to recognize that most people in California are going to only be interested



*Checking birds in India*

in what's in California therefore those of us who have an interest in the world as a whole have got to have an interest in protecting what's out there in the world as a whole. It's even important to do that in my view, even if you're never going to see it yourself. It's just important to know that it is being protected to the best of our abilities.

Human beings have wrecked a lot of the world practically beyond recognition. I believe it's almost our duty to protect a decent portion of what is left. And I think what we're showing, what we've managed to do in Ecuador and what we're starting to show elsewhere, we've managed to show that the most imperiled elements at risk can be protected. There is a mechanism for doing it. The take home message I try to put out everywhere is that there is hope, that you can do this, therefore we have the duty and obligation to do this. There is not a heaving mass of humanity out there that is eager to cut everything down and kill every last bird and kill everything larger than a rat. There is a real opportunity to protect everything that is alive now, and if we

can get our act together, I think we can do it. So therefore, I think it's important for all of us to get behind it. Obviously, some people might be more focused on their home turf. I think that's wonderful. In that case then devote all your energies to that. Do something anyway. I hope that a significant number of people are going to continue to divert resources toward efforts that are far away that they may never see, but they are going to derive a huge satisfaction that it has happened and a Pale-headed Brush-finch does still exist in Ecuador just as I derive satisfaction out of knowing that there has been a success in California habitat for desert tortoise. It's in better shape now. I'm never going to see this desert tortoise. I'm probably never going to go to the Mojave Desert. But I like to know that has happened. That's the way I feel anyway and what I'm trying to do is convince more and more people to feel that way.

**GG:** What about global warming?

**RR:** On one level I'm very pessimistic but I don't try to let that show. I try to be as optimistic as possible because I think pessimism just kills everything and you'll never want to do anything, just go out and have a beer.

**GG:** And that's easy.

**RR:** Yes, that's so easy. And that's part of my response to "what about global warming", a fundamentally important issue. And you out there in California are dealing with it far better than the country as a whole. Europe is trying to address it and so is most of the world. It's a problem we don't quite know how to come to grips with, we don't know how to deal with, but we recognize we need to. Quite apart from Kyoto and all this energy efficiency and carbon dioxide issues, I mean I'm obviously in favor of reordering things such that the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> declines to the point where it's not increasing any more and hopefully declines to the point where the earth will be a far healthier and inhabitable place and hopefully we'll pull that off. I do think, again looking at it from my perspective being concerned about critically endangered species especially





*A good day in the field.*

birds, that global warming is a bit of a red herring in that to a large extent we can't be concerned about something that's going to happen 50, 100, 200 years out. We've got to be concerned about the next few decades. That's our job.

The way I like to look at it is, what we can do now to protect what we've got now, within the time horizon of a few decades. We cannot have any idea what things are going to be like a hundred years from now. A hundred years ago there were no cars in this country. Look at it now. Look at the impact cars have had. There is no way to predict what's going to happen; what this place is going to be like. You just cannot do it. Probably winters here in New Hampshire are not going to be as severe as they have been in the last few centuries. We may lose a lot of the arctic tundra zone on Mt. Washington and a couple of the butterflies there might go extinct. Well, what on earth are we supposed to do about it? There's nothing we can do about that short of trying to deal with global warming as a global phenomenon. We still can be concerned about that butterfly even if its habitat gets reduced and the arctic tundra on Mt. Washington shifts upward from 4500 ft. above sea level to 5500 ft. above sea level and reduces its habitat, there's still some habitat there and we may lose it eventually, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't still try and save what we've got.

**GG:** Are there still birds to be discovered or have we penetrated every area?

**RR:** No, it's amazing. If that question had been asked in the sixties, people would have said no at the American Museum. When I came back from Panama that was one of the questions out there. People were still finding one or two birds a year at the most. Things were being found in the odd corner but there wasn't much effort being put into finding them and the perception and belief was that no, there wasn't much left, pretty much everything had already been found. When I first went to Ecuador (people thought) there's nothing new

to be found. After our twenty years of work, we and our colleagues found something like 200 new bird species for Ecuador, of which 10 or 11 were brand new undescribed species. In a little, tiny country like Ecuador. Colombia's still got them. I think Ecuador probably doesn't have much left. To be honest we combed it pretty carefully. But look what you just told me about this Venezuelan Softtail. Not totally surprising. It's an area that has not been worked in a modern sense very much and there they go off on a cruise ship, for God's sake, and they find a new bird species. It's ludicrous, absolutely ludicrous.

**GG:** From the deck!

**RR:** From the deck, that's even worse. It's amazing. Look at what Bret Whitney's done. He's described yet another new bird species, a new antshrike from some remote range of mountains in western Brazil, very level mountains but they have a distinctive soil profile and the vegetation is distinctive and totally isolated and so he's got a new species of antshrike. Yeah, there are places like that left that haven't been explored too carefully. Obviously, we're hitting a point of diminishing returns and eventually we're going to come up against it but I think there were probably six or eight new bird species this year from around the world if not more. Two or three from Asia. The

history of exploration of everywhere is pretty well known now so you can pick areas of isolation where it could result in something new and exciting. So I think it's going to continue a while longer. Maybe not here, but the Gunnison's Sage-Grouse had gone unrecognized until ten years ago.

Just one quick comment. If you want more controversy, here's another one on the taxonomic side. If I were managing the entire world and all its entire progress, I would leave it to the scientists to do the taxonomy, the classification side of it. Clearly they are the ones that have the competency. But I would not leave it to the AOU to come up with the English names. Like common names. I would say that should belong to groups like the ABA, to committees that would take this role very seriously. They would be the ones to decide English names. I don't think the scientists tend to understand English names. If I were running the world that's the way I would set that up.

**GG:** We birders would love that.

**RR:** When you think of it vernacular names are developed by the population as a whole. Not everybody, but by a selective group of well respected people in that community. Why should it be that a scientist in a museum in Chicago who may not even go birding and may not ever use the name, why should they have a say on the English name?

**GG:** I notice when the new antpitta was named, it seemed that you were trying to bring some attention to the region where it was discovered rather than calling it white dot headed or . . .

**RR:** Exactly. That's a very interesting point because there has been a kind of a shift away from that. One of my mentors, Gene Eisenmann, was very much of a believer and advocate for descriptive bird names – gray-crowned, gray-capped, gray-backed, gray-naped, gray-winged – those sorts of names. He is the one who ended up changing a lot of the names that had been used previously to these descriptive names and there was a bit of a backlash against it that has occurred in the last decade. Gene died about twenty five years ago now but he was very

much in favor of this kind of thing and against geographic names and so on. And that's how we ended up losing some pretty nice names here in North America and certainly a lot of the Neotropical names. I'm much more in favor of a variety of names. If I had a philosophy for it, to recognize names it almost doesn't have to mean anything, but you have to be able to remember it, therefore anything that is distinctive is probably better. If you want to call it Tchaikovsky's longleg or something that's fine, it's fairly distinctive. That's why I think Jocotoco Antpitta, even though it seems that no one knows how to pronounce it, much less knows what it means, everybody knows what it's referring to. It's referring to that very fancy antbird down in the southern Andes of Ecuador. And that's what a name is for. And it doesn't matter what it is. That's my take on it. At first I was advocating White-cheeked Antpitta or something, I think. That's probably what Gene Eisenmann would have pushed and that's what a lot of people without imagination would have pushed but I think jocotoco is a far, far better name. And I do like geographic names as well even if it's just one site of many or the first site or it's a distinctive name and hasn't been used much. It's far better to use a name like El Oro Tapaculo rather than Ecuadorian Tapaculo. English names are going to be continuously argued about. It's happening now. I don't see any real problem with that. Who knows? People tend to go around calling Hudsonian Godwit HUGOs and we may end up calling them just plain HUGOs. Everybody knows what you're talking about when you say a HUGO. There may be a day when we just say HUGO and MAGO.

**GG:** Back to the Neotropics. Why are there more species in Ecuador than in North America?

**RR:** One of the obvious reasons that there are so many species in Ecuador is because the habitat diversity in countries like Ecuador is much greater than anything seen in North America and that includes habitats that are just not seen in an area the size of North America. If North America had tropical forest capable


of supporting 300-400 species in an individual area we would have more species, but because we don't have tropical forests we don't have those levels of alpha diversity, individual site diversity. The other way to think about it is that tropical and montane forests are structurally so much more diverse than forests that are seen here. Not only are there more basic, core habitats in a country like Ecuador but beyond that, each individual habitat is more complex, more structurally diverse, and therefore is capable of supporting very specialized bird species and behaviors than we've got here. So you end up with a whole host of different possibilities for bird evolution than in Canada. And that's basically what we've seen. For instance, in North America, if you are a fruit specialist, you have to get the hell out of here because there's no fruit. In other words you can never be a toucan in New Hampshire. It's easy to be a toucan in the tropics because there's fruit there and it's available year round. So those are the two ways of looking at the number of species there.

And the other way is to split everything then you've got more species. Keeps the birdwatchers happy. Seriously, the splitting issue is an important one. There is some evidence now accumulating, and I think everyone would agree, that it really is the case that the Neotropics have been the focus of quite a lot of this kind of work over the last three or four decades, more so than some other tropical areas. The interesting comparison is not so much Ecuador back to the United States. The interesting comparison is Ecuador to Malaysia. Why are there so many more species in Ecuador than there are in Malaysia? And there's no question that most people find now that one reason for

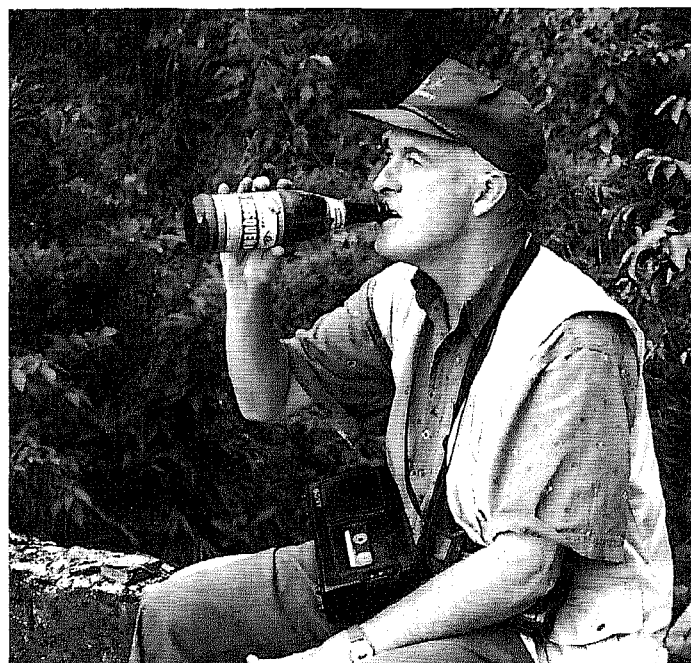
that is that people have not looked as carefully at the Oriental fauna or the African fauna as they have at the Neotropical fauna and that therefore there are going to be quite a few splits left out there that have not been recognized, or not been accepted, or even not been suggested as possibilities for species level. That's the case in those areas and that has been the case here. And there's no question that in a country like Ecuador one reason there's so many birds there is that now we are recognizing that there are for instance two barred woodcreepers. Back when I was starting out in the sixties there was one Barred Woodcreeper. They may actually be three Barred Woodcreepers. That's because there's been so much effort directed at trying to understand the Neotropical avifauna. I think quite a bit more than that's going on in Asia and the same thing is going to be happening there as well.

**GG:** More eyeballs and brains.

**RR:** Yep.

**GG:** Thanks so much for your time. 

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity. The original text is available upon request. — editor*



*A well deserved respite.*

## WESTERN Tanager

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# Colorado Chicken Run, Part II

by Dexter Kelly

### High Mountains and Winter Finches

After the Sharp-tailed Grouse spectacle, we faced the longest leg of our trip. We hoped to head south alongside the highest ranges of the Rockies and cross Guenella Pass, at over 11,000 feet, in search of White-tailed Ptarmigan. A visit to a ranger station in Steamboat Springs quashed that plan; Mike found out that Guenella was snowed in, as it should be in a normally wet April. So the ptarmigan was the one chicken we missed on this trip.

But there were consolations. We stopped for breakfast (finally!) at a café in the small town of Kremmling. Someone in the café noticed we were birders, and told us about feeders in someone's front yard. Rosy-finches had been seen there. We found the feeders, loaded with Cassin's Finches. There was also a rather dingy Evening Grosbeak, and someone spotted a redpoll, which no one else could find, unfortunately. And the rosy-finches had moved on. But our appetite for these winter finches was whetted.

On the way south, just outside Granby, we stopped at an isolated reservoir that hosted Barrow's and Common goldeneye, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Green-winged Teal, and Common Merganser. There were White Pelicans, too.

But the biggest attraction of the day was at the Loveland Ski Resort. One of our group had a daughter who was working there as an instructor. She told her mom about a feeding station maintained by resort staff near lift #2, next to the trail leading to ski patrol headquarters. We sat down in a row on a porch across from the single pole feeder and enjoyed easy views of most of Colorado's winter finches.

To begin, a big bright pink and gray finch sat on top of the feeder pole. It seemed big enough to be a Pine Grosbeak, which I wanted very much to see. But it soon became obvious that it was a female Brown-capped Rosy Finch. More females showed up in the feeder bin, joined by males. Eventually, a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, darker with a gray wash on the head, hopped into the tray, only to be

butted out by the more numerous brown-caps. We could study the difference between the males and female brown-caps, and the gray-crowned, as they jostled each other in the feeder and on the ground.

And there were other birds. Some female Pine Grosbeaks showed up, one with especially bright lemon-yellow cap and cheeks. They were fat with long forked tails, faint wing bars, and white-edged scapulars and wing feathers. There were plenty of Cassin's Finches, Mountain Chickadees, Gray-headed Juncos and a single White-throated Sparrow. A chickaree (squirrel) showed up and scared all the birds away for a minute, but the skiers walking by didn't faze them.

We were there for less than an hour. If we had hung around a little longer, some Black Rosy-Finches may have shown up, making three species of rosy-finches in the same feeder! (They had been seen earlier that day.) We might have seen some male Pine Grosbeaks too, which would have made me very happy. The resort management was happy to have us there, just sitting and gawking, not even skiing. But we had to make it to Gunnison before nightfall, Mike said. With some difficulty, he herded us back to the vans.

That's one of the drawbacks to birding tours; you have to adhere to a schedule, especially if you're trying to get a lot of species in a limited period of time. But, if you discover a good place on the tour, you can always plan to come back on your own. The next time you're in Colorado in the wintertime, drop by the Loveland Ski Resort, and look for the feeders. It's right off Interstate 80 just east of the tunnel, an hour or so west of Denver.

### Gunnison Sage-Grouse

This is the bird everyone has to come to Colorado to see. Almost the entire population is confined to the upper Gunnison river basin, and a severe multi-year drought has caused a drastic decline in breeding pairs. All leks save one are



now closed to public view. The exception is the Hot Springs lek on RD87, east of Gunnison off Route 50. This location is set up to give hordes of birders a view of the lek while keeping them concealed from the birds. There was a blind on the lower slope of the viewing site, with grandstand seats. This was usually reserved in advance for groups such as ours. Other birders could gather above, by the side of the road, behind a high barrier, over and through which they could peer to get a more obstructed view of the lek grounds, which were at least a hundred yards off across a valley, behind a barbed wire fence which obscured the view further.



*Dexter Kelly*

Our turn came the next morning. Without uttering a word, we filed into the blind an hour before sunrise, conversing only in whispers once inside. Through binoculars, we could get hints of shapes moving about, at first hard to distinguish from wishful hallucinations. But as the cloudy dawn drew closer, we could see for sure that they were grouse, with bright white chests. It took a 'scope to make out the black plume on the males' heads, and to even spot the skulking females. The dance was hard to follow behind the fence and the bushes, but I could see the males shake their plumes

four times, then turn and shake three or four more times before scurrying behind a bush. Before I could make out an entire sequence, a loud coyote shriek came out of the field to the left, and the birds disappeared.

It was ten minutes before sunrise. I had seen six birds; the local naturalist/guide had counted eight. He said that the coyote hadn't scared the birds; they always knocked off at that time. We wouldn't have seen much more even if they kept dancing after dawn, since the sun would be shining right in our eyes.

Emerging from the blind, we found more than a hundred birders milling about on the road by the big sign. They were being harangued by a disgruntled local who was standing on the high bank on the other side of the road. He was blaming the birders for disturbing the grouse, and making it difficult for them to breed. But his rant seemed unfair. The fact that so many birders and so few birds were being drawn to this one spot indicated that other lek grounds remained that were inaccessible to birders, and therefore better for grouse. But the prolonged drought in the southern Rockies is probably a much worse threat to this rarest of North American "chickens" than intrusive birdwatchers.


### **Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

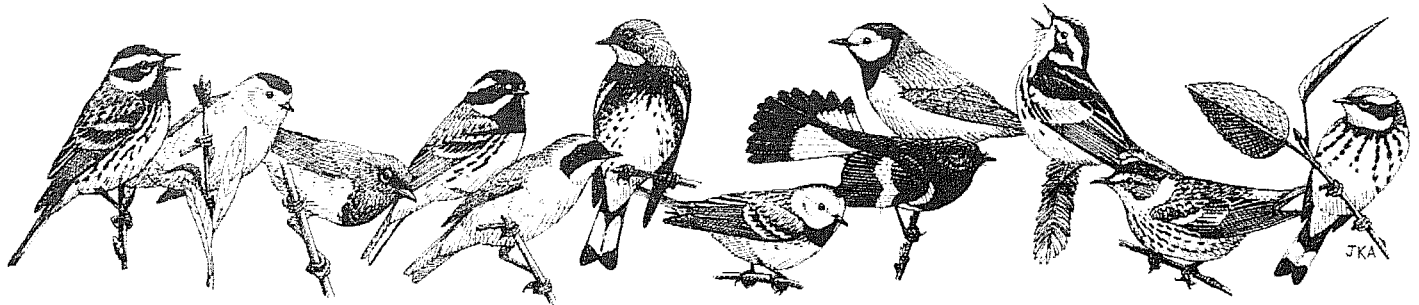
Second in rarity to Gunnison Sage-Grouse among North American galliforms, these chickens are most easily found in southeast Kansas, on the Cimarron National Grasslands northeast of the little town of Elkhart. We drove there over endless flat short-grass prairie, most of which was cut or plowed. Nonetheless, prairie-chickens could hide very well in those barren, open flats; only a few sharp-eyed birders in our car could spot them. The car would screech to a halt and the birds would fly off over the slightly rolling horizon. A pair of Swainson's Hawks and a Loggerhead Shrike were much more accommodating, but there wasn't much time to bird. We had a dinner date with the man who would guide us to the prairie-chickens the next morning.

At dinner in the town café, Lawrence Smith, a local rancher and expert birder,

regaled us with an account of the many birds that would show up in Elkhart around migration time. It's close to some of the best birding spots on the Great Plains, and at least some of the locals are proud of their avian attractions.

Well before dawn we followed Mr. Smith's truck through a maze of dirt roads bordering barbed wire fences, past an oil well, to a fencepost with a strand of red surveyor's tape wrapped around the top. It was still dark, but we weren't allowed to get out of the van; just opened the door. We heard gurgling sounds, like coffee perking in a Maxwell House commercial, along with some yellowlegs-like chortling. The light grew slowly and we saw the birds crouching and running on the other side of the fence, maybe twenty yards away. We could see the black barring and neck tufts, but the underlying colors were hard to make out, and the gular sac looked more orange than red in the sickly light of dawn. Some Burrowing Owls looked on at the dancing from their burrows; it was a prairie dog town. I envied the owls for their better viewpoints. They would eventually get a better look at those gular sacs and paler throat, and could clinch the ID visually. We had to rely on vocalizations and dance steps to distinguish these birds from their greater cousins. This was the largest publicly accessible gathering of Lesser Prairie-Chickens on the planet, fewer than a dozen birds.

We birded on the way back to Denver of course, but there was nothing special. The Californians were glad to see a light-morph Swainson's Hawk, some Franklin's Gulls on a small pond, and a Black-billed Magpie with a floppy feather. The Midwesterners were excited by Brewer's Blackbirds. Great-tailed Grackles have made it all the way out to western Kansas too. I might come back to Elkhart during fall migration, but I don't expect to get as close to Lesser Prairie-Chickens in broad daylight as I was that morning in the dark. I'll probably never see the red on the gular sac. I could try to sneak back to the lek in spring, but the road was on private property (a lease inholding in the National Grassland). And I don't think that surveyor's tape will still be there to mark the fencepost. 



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Jon Feenstra

Maybe we can say that it's only been an okay fall for birding here in Los Angeles County, but I think we can all agree that it's shaping up to be a very interesting winter. Our summer heat ended with the month of September and some heavy rains in mid-October cleared the air for us. Rains have been occasional since then and perhaps evidence of the El Niño projected for the coming months. Coincidentally, or not, there has been a large push of montane birds into the lowlands and deserts evidenced by the many reports of Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Pine Siskins from the L.A. Basin. I probably shouldn't get into this but multiple Evening Grosbeaks and even a Pine Grosbeak were seen at a Kern County migrant trap this fall. But here in L.A. we had some great birds, too.

**Greater White-fronted Geese** were seen in multiple locations around the county including: one on the L.A. River from September 21 to October 15 (when the rains came) [JG, NM, MB, RB], four at the Piute Ponds from September 25 to October 2 [AB, JF, KLG], and one at Del Rey Lagoon on November 8 [DC]. Two more returned for another winter at Santa Fe Dam, noted on September 25 [AL]. Also at Santa Fe Dam that day was the returning **Cackling Goose**, that in winters previous had been considered merely a small subspecies of Canada Goose [AL]. Two immature **Tundra Swans** were present on Lake Palmdale on November 13 [JF, RC]. A single **Eurasian Wigeon** was observed on November 6 at the Valencia Golf Course [DoM]. A female or immature **White-winged Scoter** was seen with the Surf Scoter flock off Dockweiler State Beach November 9 [RB] and two were seen

there November 13 [DB]. A female **Black Scoter** was at Westward Beach on November 13 [KLG]. A **Long-tailed Duck** was seen feeding in the channel at Marina del Rey for a few days after November 12 [DB]. **Hooded Mergansers** were a strong presence at the Soka University ponds in Malibu with nine on November 5 and seven remaining a week later [BP]. Two more were at the Los Encinos Historical Monument on November 8 [JB]. **Common Loons** are a rather uncommon migrant through the interior so ten on Lake Palmdale on November 13 was quite a surprise [JF].

An **American Bittern** was at Ballona Freshwater Marsh between October 23 and November 6 [RB, MR] and another one was seen at the El Dorado Nature Center October 30 [KG]. The **Little Blue Heron** present at Malibu Lagoon this summer was last seen September 18 [LS]. Two **Bald Eagles** were seen along the L.A. River this fall. One was a second-year immature seen from Hollydale Park in South Gate on October 28 and 29 [GH, JoP] and the second was an adult near Deforest Park on November 3 [RB]. Both birds were tagged, indicating likely participants in the local reintroduction campaign.

Quite unusual on the immediate coast (especially in L.A. County where we have such little habitat left) was a **Mountain Plover** at Malibu Lagoon on October 16 [HW]. The last migrating **Solitary Sandpiper** was seen on the L.A. River on September 17 [TM]. Due to the unfavorable conditions at the Piute Ponds, the Lancaster

Sewage Ponds seemed to be where all the Antelope Valley's shorebirds ended up. Two juvenile **Red Knots** were there on September 21 [JiP]. Rare but regular in the interior, **Sanderlings** were also observed at the sewage ponds for nearly a month – three juveniles on September 8 [DH], four on September 28 [MSM, MJSM], and a single there October 2 [KLG, JF]. **Baird's Sandpipers** were there as well with two on September 28 [MSM, MJSM] and one on October 2 [KLG, JF]. **Pectoral Sandpipers** finished their run this fall with one at Ballona Freshwater Marsh on September 17-18 [RB, EG], four on the L.A. River September 17 [TM], and one at the Piute Ponds on October 2 [KLG, JF]. The immature **Ruff** present on the lower L.A. River since early September was last seen on October 15 [RB, MB], just before the heavy rains blew everything out to the ocean. One of only a very few records for the Antelope Valley, a second-year immature **Heermann's Gull** was a nice surprise at Apollo Park on September 25 [AB, MF, NF]. Juvenile **Sabine's Gulls** were seen at the Lancaster Sewage



Digital Photo by Harriet Walter

Mountain Plover

Ponds on September 25 [TM] and October 2 [KLG, JF] and at the Piute Ponds on October 2 [KLG, JF]. Those two sites produce Sabine's Gulls nearly as reliably as a pelagic trip in late September and early October. Of near-shore pelagic nature, a **Marbled Murrelet** was seen flying up the coast off Malibu Lagoon on November 13 [KLG].

The latest of many invasive species bearing down on us, five **Eurasian Collared-Doves** at Point Dume were grudgingly recorded on October 2 [KLG, JF] and again on November 13 [KLG]. These birds likely dispersed from a population either in Ventura or interior California. On October 2 they were in the company of two **White-winged Doves** which definitely came from inland [KLG, JF]. Rarely seen in fall migration, a **Black Swift** over the L.A. River with Vaux's Swifts on October 3 was a good find [DB]. Huge numbers of **Vaux's Swifts**, estimated to reach into the tens of thousands, were this year again roosting in downtown Long Beach in October [NK].

Although widespread last winter, the only report of **Lewis's Woodpeckers** this season was of three at Soka University in Malibu from November 5 to 12 [BP]. Three **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were found in the lowlands this fall: an adult male at Harbor Park on October 15 [MB], an adult female along the L.A. River at Atwater Village on October 24 [RB], and an adult male on November 13 in Valyermo [JF]. Flycatchers were well represented this season with multiple reports of unusual species. A **Least Flycatcher** was seen on September 25 at Madrona Marsh [KL]. The **Eastern Phoebe** that has spent several winters in Sepulveda Basin returned again this year and was first noted on October 30 [LS]. Similarly, a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** that wintered at the Piute Ponds last year made it back on October 12 [RC]. Three more Vermilion Flycatchers, one adult male, one adult female, and an immature male, were seen at El Dorado Park on October 16 [RB]. Like most years, a few **Tropical Kingbirds** were reported along the coast. One was along the lower L.A. River on October 9 [KL], another was at DeForest Park on October 19 [RB], and a third (likely the returned wintering bird)

was at Malibu Lagoon on October 24 and 25 [IW, JH, JA]. **Western Kingbirds**, rarely seen in this area after mid-September, were detected on the lower L.A. River on October 9 [KL] and at Hansen Dam on October 30 [KLG]. A juvenile **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** popped up at Malibu Lagoon on October 25 [JA, JH]. **Plumbeous Vireos** made a fairly typical showing with several birds reported in the month of October from Harbor Park [MB], El Dorado Park [KG], and Ladera Park [RB]. The coast furnished one transient **Sage Thrasher** at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on September 22 [RB].

On to warblers! **Palm Warblers** came through in October and were found at Peck Rd. Park on October 10 [AL], at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh from October 13 to November 6 [DS, RB, KL], and at Malibu Lagoon on October 30 [KLG]. A **Blackpoll Warbler** was seen at Banning Park on September 24 [KL]. A **Black-and-white Warbler** at Village Green on October 20 [RB] and one at Bonelli Park on November 14 [AL] were the only ones reported this fall. Only one **American Redstart** made it into birder radar, an immature male at Recreation Park in El Segundo on October 27 [RB]. Perhaps the "bird of the season" was a drab immature **Cape**

**May Warbler** found at El Dorado Park October 24 [KG] that hung around for a few days and frustrated many birders trying to connect with it. The only close contender to this award may have been the **Painted Redstart** present at Hansen Dam on September 18 and 19 [KLG]. Transient **Yellow-breasted Chats** were noted at Hansen Dam on September 18 [JF] and at Ballona Freshwater Marsh on October 9 [DB]. A male **Summer Tanager** made an appearance at Whittier Narrows on October 22 [RG, LO, CA].

Only one **Clay-colored Sparrow** was reported this season – from Madrona Marsh on September 24-25 [DaM]. **Brewer's Sparrows**, common in the deserts, but uncommon transients along the coastal plain were seen at Eaton Canyon on September 22 [JF] and at Madrona Marsh on September 24 [DaM]. Also fairly common in the desert but uncommon this side of the mountains, a migrant **Vesper Sparrow** was at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on October 9 [DB]. The first **Swamp Sparrow** of the fall was at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on October 20 [KL] and another was at very high elevation at Jackson Lake on November 13 [JF]. A **White-throated Sparrow** returned to a yard in La Cañada on October 14 for another winter [MH]. Two **Indigo Buntings** were seen this fall – one at DeForest Park on September 18 [DB] and one that lingered from October 12 to 18 at Apollo Park in the Antelope Valley [RC, KLG]. A presumably wintering male **Scott's Oriole** was seen in Valyermo on November 13 [JF]. Reports of **Pine Siskins** from the lowlands and Antelope Valley were too numerous to list them all. Two **Evening Grosbeaks** were seen in the San Gabriels with one at Jackson Lake and another at Chilao, both on October 16 [SC, MR].

Reports from San Clemente Island for September through November included an expected mix of unexpected birds including **ANOTHER Snow Bunting** on November 3. Great birds were recorded there on a daily basis, many of which were not seen at all here on the mainland this season, like: Bobolinks, Dickcissels, White-winged Doves, Lark Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Red-throated Pipit, and Palm

*continued next page*

**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:

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Jon Feenstra at [feenstra@its.caltech.edu](mailto:feenstra@its.caltech.edu)

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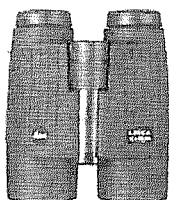
Warblers [BS, JM]. My plan for a bird-access suspension bridge from San Pedro was shot down by the military administrators of the island . . .

So, here we are at the end of the year. Migration has wound down and many of our birds have moved out. However, some interesting things have moved in. We're all hoping that this fall's invasion of finches and mountain species continues through the winter season. In addition, there is the possibility of bumping into some of our lesser-seen friends like Red Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks. We'll know soon. Keep your eyes and ears open. 

[JA] = Jim Abernathy  
[CA] = Chris Akiyoshi  
[RB] = Richard Barth  
[DB] = David Bell  
[JB] = Jean Brandt  
[AB] = Alan Brown  
[MB] = Martin Byhower  
[SC] = Sheridan Coffey  
[DC] = Dan Cooper  
[RC] = Ron Cyger  
[JF] = Jon Feenstra  
[MF] = Mary Freeman  
[NF] = Nick Freeman  
[KLG] = Kimball Garrett  
[RG] = Ron Garrett  
[KG] = Karen Gilbert  
[JG] = John Green  
[EG] = Ed Griffin  
[JH] = Jim Hardesty  
[GH] = Gjon Hazard  
[DH] = Denise Hamilton  
[MH] = Mark Hunter  
[NK] = Nancy Kenyon  
[KL] = Kevin Larson  
[AL] = Andrew Lee  
[DoM] = Doug Martin  
[JM] = Jimmy McMorran  
[TM] = Tom Miko  
[DaM] = Dave Moody  
[NM] = Nathan Moorhatch  
[LO] = Lou Orr  
[BP] = Bob Pann  
[JP] = Jim Pike  
[JoP] = Joan Powell  
[MaR] = Martin Reid  
[MiR] = Michael Rosen  
[MSM] = Mike San Miguel  
[MJS] = Michael J. San Miguel  
[LS] = Larry Schmahl  
[DS] = Don Sterba  
[BS] = Brian Sullivan  
[HW] = Hartmut Walter  
[IW] = Irwin Woldman

## NEW AT THE BOOKSTORE

We are excited to announce the addition of Leica to enhance our outstanding line of birding optics including Brunton, Bushnell, Kowa, Sheltered Wings, and Swarovski.



If buying new binoculars or a spotting scope is in your future, please consider the bookstore for your optic needs. Call the Bookstore at (888) 522-7428 for prices.

All bookstore profits go to the support  
LAAS education and conservations projects.  
Happy New Year!

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## Volunteer Opportunities

**Bird Walks for Kids.** Leading bird walks for schoolchildren at Debs Park and Baldwin Hills this spring. There might also be a need for classroom visits, to supplement science classes. In the summer, we might be working at day camps. Nothing definite is scheduled at this writing, but more details will be in the next *Western Tanager*, and will be posted on the website.

Contact Dexter Kelly – [education@laaudubon.org](mailto:education@laaudubon.org), if you are interested.

**Hospitality.** Olga Clarke has been working hard these many years to prepare snacks and drinks that are served in the Bookstore on meeting nights. But she shouldn't have to do this every month! Maybe some of us can take turns providing meeting refreshments, at least one month at a time. It would free up Martha to sell more books, too. Contact Martha at Audubon House; [books@laaudubon.org](mailto:books@laaudubon.org)

**Executive Secretary.** At this writing (mid November), no one has responded to our plea of last month to fill this vacant Board position. Did we imply that you needed an MBA for this job? Hardly; just some routine managerial skills and a few hours a month, to review operations at Audubon House, including bookstore, membership, pelagic trips, and other such functions. Contact Martha – [books@laaudubon.org](mailto:books@laaudubon.org)

**Please call Audubon House is (323) 876-0202 about these opportunities.**

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## BIRDATHON – FOR LAAS!

May is Birdathon month! All Los Angeles Audubon Society field trips during May, including Dexter Kelly's Morongo Valley trip, will be Birdathons. We hope each participant will donate a chosen amount (may we suggest a dollar per species?). Proceeds will go to the programs of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. More details about this in the next *Western Tanager*; watch the website too.

## Dr. Robert Ridgely To Speak in 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). He discovered Jocotoco Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*) in 1997 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.

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, other animals, and plants 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)



# 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 2 —**

**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, January 2 —**

**Los Angeles Christmas Bird Count.** Contact compiler to participate.  
**Ray Schep** at rayoohoo@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, January 8 —**

**East Antelope Valley.** Leaders: **Jerry Dunn** and **Scott Harris**. Beyond 50th Street East is uncharted territory for all but a few birders. However, Scott has DFG oversight of the area, and Jerry calls it home; 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.

**Sunday, January 9 —**

**Whittier Narrows.** Leader: **Ray Jillson**. View colorful resident and migrating birds, including the introduced Northern Cardinal. Take Peck Dr. off the 60 Fwy in South El Monte (just west of the 605 Fwy). Take the off ramp onto Durfee Ave. heading W (right) and turn left into the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave. \$2 suggested donation. Meet at 8:15 AM.

**Saturday, January 15 —**

**Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.** Leader: **Karen Johnson**. 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

## 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.

## 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.*

kiosk (\$3 parking fee), turn left (leading to the "Olympic Forest") and park in the first available spaces. Meet at 8:00 AM.

**Sunday, January 15 —**

**Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area.** Leader: **Kris Ohlenkamp**. "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. American Bittern sometimes seen. 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 AM, and bird until about 11:30 AM.

**Sunday, January 16 —**

**Ballona Wetlands.** **Bob Shanman** will be leading this trip to our nearest wetland and adjacent rocky jetty. Good spot for Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, gulls, and possible Large-billed Savannah Sparrow. 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-Sunday, January 29-30 —**

**Salton Sea.** Leader: **Nick Freeman**. Yellow-footed Gull, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Snow and Ross' geese, Sandhill Cranes, Stilt Sandpiper, and Gila Woodpecker all hoped for to certain. Send \$5, name, phone number, and a SASE to LAAS for info including the meeting place at the Sea. No limit. Meet there at 9:30 AM Saturday. Calipatria Inn (800) 830-1113 and Brawley Inn (760) 344-1199 are recommended. FRS radios and 'scopes helpful.

**Sunday, February 6 —**

**Topanga State Park.** Leaders: **Ken Wheeland** and **Chris Tosdevin**. Meet at 8:00 AM. See January 2 listing for details.

**Friday, February 4 —**

**Gull Study Workshop Lecture.** Speaker **Larry Allen** will discuss most gulls that have appeared in North America – most of which have made it to California.

Larry will specifically address general aspects of gull topography, the confusing logic of molt sequences, and the finer aspects of identification to age and species. Slides, study skins, and handouts will be used. Meet at Audubon House, 7-10 PM, with one break. 20 maximum. \$10 fee and phone number mailed to LAAS covers lecture and field trip. Park in the south lot, so you don't get locked in.

**Sunday, February 6 —**

**Gull Study Workshop Field Trip.**

Leader: **Larry Allen**. Put your new knowledge to use in the field, perhaps even identifying California and Ring-billed gulls as they fly overhead! Meet at the Malibu Lagoon kiosk at 8:00 AM. Driving north to Malibu on PCH, either turn right on Cross Creek Road after the bridge over the creek and park here; or park on PCH, preferably on the north (right) side. Walk across PCH at the signal, and meet at the kiosk by the lagoon. If not attending the lecture, call Audubon House or call the tape (323) 874-1318 to confirm the meeting site, which could change. 20 maximum. \$10 fee and phone number mailed to LAAS covers lecture and field trip. Possible parking fee. Bring a lunch.

**Sunday, February 13 —**

**Whittier Narrows.** Leader: **Ray Jillson**. Meet at 8:15 AM. See January 9 listing.

**Saturday, February 19 —**

**Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.**

Leader: **Eleanor Osgood**.

Meet at 8:00 AM. \$3 entry fee.

See January 15 listing for details.

**Sunday, February 20 —**

**Ballona Wetlands.**

Leader: **Bob Shanman**.

Meet at 8:00 AM. See January 16 listing for details.

**Saturday-Sunday, February 26-27 —**

**Carrizo Plain.** Leaders: **Larry Allen**

and **Mary Freeman**. Meet at 8:00 AM in Maricopa. Great scenery. We will see Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles, LeConte's Thrasher, Merlin, and pronghorn; with Rough-legged Hawk, Mountain Plover and Sandhill Crane likely. To spice up the trip, we will meet in Maricopa, access the Plain via Crocker Springs Road, and stay in Buttonwillow Saturday night; then Sunday leave the Plain north via Bitterwater Road, spending a few hours at Kern NWR before we return to L.A. If possible, please carpool or avail your vehicle to others when you reserve. Your phone number will be released for carpooling unless you request otherwise. Send name, phone number, \$5 per person, and SASE to sign-up with Audubon House for exact directions and information. Reserve your own room in Buttonwillow for Saturday night (Motel 6). FRS radios and 'scopes helpful. Limit: 14.

**Saturday, March 5 —**

**Bonelli Regional Park.**

Leader **Rod Higbie**. Bonelli Regional Park is a remarkable island of habitat. It has lake, coastal sage, mixed woodland, and riparian habitats. Birds regularly seen include California Gnatcatcher, Cactus Wren, Golden Eagle, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. 200 other species throughout the year. From L.A., take the 10 or 210 Fwy east towards San Dimas to the top stretch of the 57 Fwy. Proceed N from the 10, or S from the 210 on the 57 Fwy to the Via Verde exit just N of

the 10/57 interchange (at the bottom of Kellogg Hill). If coming from the N, turn left onto Via Verde, and left into the "Park and Ride" lot. If coming from the S, be alert that the offramp comes up fast. Proceed Rt. off the ramp onto Via Verde to the "Park and Ride" lot. We will meet here at 7:30 AM to carpool since there is a \$7.00/car park entrance fee. Rod will continue after lunch if there is interest. There are picnic tables and facilities. Bring lunch, if you plan to bird into the afternoon. No limit, but please call your name and phone number in to LAAS if possible.

**Saturday-Sunday, March 12-13 —**

**Anza Borrego with Fred Heath.** The

spring explosion of desert flora and fauna should be well under way in the Colorado Desert, including butterflies, Desert Bighorn, herps, and early birds in the throes of breeding activity. Swainson's Hawk, Black-throated Sparrow, Scott's and Hooded orioles, chuckwalla all likely. 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 January 12, or motels earlier. Limit 20 people. Send SASE with phone number and \$5 fee to LAAS to learn 7:00 AM meeting place and more details. Pleasant to warm days, cool to cold nights.

**Saturday-Sunday, April 16-17 —**

**Owens Valley Grouse Trip.**

**Mary Freeman** leads. Sage Grouse on the lek, breathtaking scenery, raptor-rich valleys. Meet early in Big Pine Saturday. Limited to 20. To sign up, send \$20 and a SASE to LAAS. More details in mailer. Reserve rooms early.



PELAGIC TRIP

**Saturday, February 26 —**

**Palos Verdes Escarpment and Redondo Canyon.** Eight-hour trip departs from Marina del Rey at 7:30 AM 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 5); Xantus's Murrelet; Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets. Rarity: Ancient Murrelet. Gray Whales and dolphins are often seen.

Leaders: **Kimball Garrett** and **Todd McGrath**.

\$50 – No galley; coffee and hot water available.

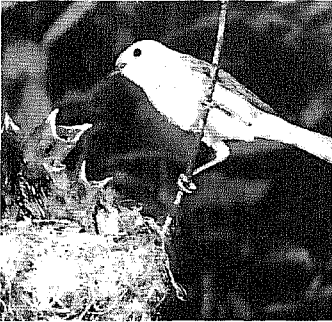
# EVENING MEETINGS

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

**Tuesday, January 11**

**Dr. Stephen Rothstein**

**Cowbirds: Why they are so maligned and yet are so interesting to biologists.**



Parasitic birds, such as cowbirds and cuckoos, and their hosts have long been subjects of great interest to biologists, especially those concerned with behavior, physiology and evolution. In recent years, cowbirds have also attracted a great deal of attention from the conservation community because of potential effects on endangered host species. Dr. Rothstein will cover some parasitic bird research involving their co-evolution with hosts, the extent to which cowbirds threaten the survival of host species, and whether cowbirds should be killed off to aid impacted host species. Dr. Rothstein is Professor of Biological Science at U.C. Santa Barbara.

**Tuesday, February 8**

**Garry George**

**Kill Your Lawn**



Come hear how Garry has transformed the front and backyard of his urban Los Angeles residence into a habitat built for birds. He has an astounding yard list of over 70 species of birds thanks to his water feature and plantings of native vegetation, which literally draw nearby birds out of the sky. Garry was awarded a certification by the National Wildlife Federation for his efforts. In his talk he will discuss converting your yard or garden space to native habitat for the benefit of resident and migrant species, even in an urban environment.

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