

# The Western Tanager

VOLUME 41, 1974-75 No. 2 October

## THE BIRDS OF CLIPPERTON ISLAND by Kenneth E. Stager

Synopsis of the introduction to a scientific article published in  
"The Condor," October 1964.

Although Clipperton Island has been visited by only a few ornithologists, it nevertheless has been long recognized as a haven for large numbers of oceanic birds. Clipperton is the most easterly coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean, approximately 600 nautical miles southwest of the Mexican state of Guerrero. The nearest coral atoll to Clipperton is Pukapuka, in the eastern Tuamotus, 2300 nautical miles to the southwest. In 1958, during the International Geophysical Year, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography engaged in a number of research cruises to the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean. One of these cruises was the "Doldrums" expedition, made for the purpose of studying the Equatorial Counter Current. As an adjunct to the "Doldrums" expedition, the Scripps Institution landed a party of 13 scientists and technicians on Clipperton for the purpose of making an intensive survey of the life on the atoll. It was my privilege to serve as the ornithologist of this field party. The landing on Clipperton was effected from the research vessel "Spencer F. Baird" on the morning of August 7, 1958, and work was terminated on August 26, 1958. On this latter date, nine members of the field party were picked up by the "Spencer F. Baird" and taken to Panama for the return home. The other four members of the field party remained on Clipperton for an additional month to complete a program of shark studies.

### PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE ISLAND

The island consists of a low, oval-shaped atoll, 4 kilometers long. The lagoon in the center became land locked sometime between 1839 and 1858. The water of the lagoon is somewhat brackish, but during the rainy season the surface layer of water is fresh enough for human consumption. The ribbon of land varies in width from 45 to 400 meters. The coral limestone ribbon varies in elevation from 0.65 to 4.0 meters above estimated mean high tide level. On the south periphery of the atoll, a large volcanic rock rises to a height of 29 meters and is visible from every part of the island.

### ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The general low elevation of the atoll and its extensive coral reefs, coupled with the fact that it is exposed to the open sea, has made Clipperton a hazard to navigation since early in the 16th century. Periodic shipwrecks as well as planned landings have provided the island with a temporary human population of varying numbers in the past 200 years. The presence of man on the island has left its mark in many ways, especially with regard to the vegetative cover. Around the turn of the present century, a British phosphate company maintained a bird-guano mining operation on Clipperton. During this period it was reported that except for a lone coco palm tree the island was almost completely devoid of

vegetation, supposedly due to the presence of large concentrations of oceanic birds and countless numbers of red land crabs. At the time of our visit to the island in 1958, there were several hundred coco palms present, a group of six palms providing a campsite for our field party on the northeast side of the atoll. At the time of our stay on Clipperton a portion of the island was covered with luxuriant mats of goatsfoot morning-glory, common to many atolls of the Pacific area.

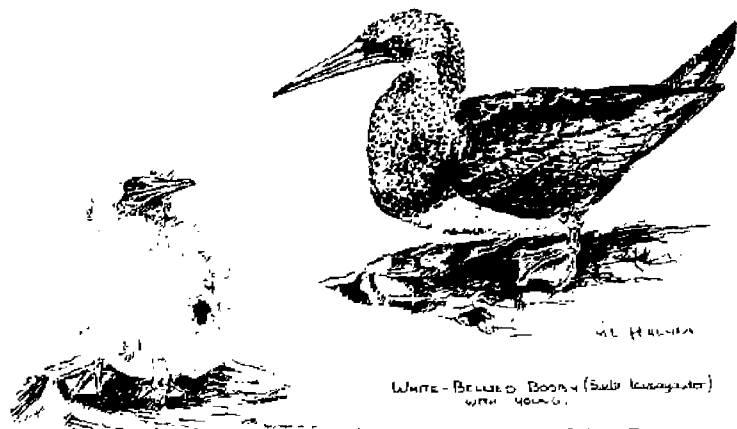
In the past two hundred years the sparse vegetative cover of this atoll has been subjected to alternating periods of destruction and re-establishment. The destruction of the vegetation on Clipperton was probably due to catastrophic hurricane action with regeneration hampered by the presence of countless numbers of land crabs and sea birds. The crabs supposedly ate the new vegetation back as fast as it developed and the sea birds damaged the new growth by their nesting activities.

Pigs were introduced on Clipperton around 1897 and were probably survivors of the wreck of the British ship "Kinkora." In 1917 the number of pigs on the atoll was estimated at about twelve. Subsequent visitors to the atoll estimated the number of pigs at fifty, except for the crew of the schooner "Ethel Sterling" that reported the number at nearly one hundred. Earlier visitors to the atoll had reported the presence of sea birds in countless thousands. In 1958, however, even the most abundant species (boobies, terns, and frigates) were only present in a few hundred and it was evident that there had been a serious depletion in their numbers. After our landing, a rapid reconnaissance of the atoll disclosed the presence of pigs in all areas and their numbers were estimated at more than fifty. The pigs wandered about the atoll singly and in small bands. It was a common sight to see a colony of birds take to the air and upon close examination with the aid of binoculars, to see a pig or two wandering about the nesting area.

Concluded overleaf

### About the Author

Dr. Kenneth E. Stager is Senior Curator of Ornithology at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, and is well known to members of our Society for the help and talks he has given our members, as well as for his professional contributions to ornithology. Dr. Stager has led a number of expeditions to islands off the coast of Baja California, Pacific Islands, and Africa, in some of which our members have participated.



White-Bellied Booby (Sula leucogaster)  
with young.

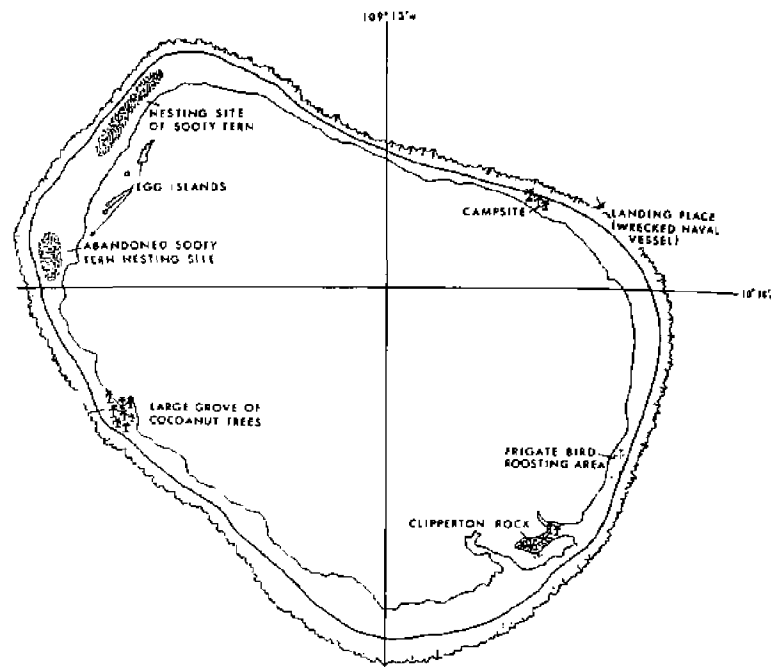
Drawing by Mary Ellen Pereyra

## THE BIRDS OF CLIPPERTON ISLAND,

The sad consequences to bird populations resulting from the introduction of non-indigenous animals to the small islands of the Pacific are too well known to warrant discussion here.

The small size of the atoll indicated that a pig extirpation plan would be feasible if pursued steadily during my stay on the island. I had come prepared for such a program and began killing pigs on the second day after arrival. A study was made of the favorite hiding and foraging areas of the pigs, a bit of sound military tactics was employed, and the pig population began to decline. The daily kill ranged from one to five animals and continued until the final week of our stay on Clipperton. The score on this date stood at 57 pigs and it appeared that the last pig on Clipperton had been destroyed. The disturbing fear that I had overlooked a pregnant sow somewhere in the atoll, however, caused me to secure the promise of help from the four men who were to remain on the island for an additional month. During this subsequent period, the men kept a close watch for pigs and found only a solitary male, which was promptly killed. With the removal of these 58 animals it is felt that the problem of feral pigs no longer poses a threat to the ground-nesting bird colonies of Clipperton.

In fact, since this article was written studies in 1972 by French ornithologists on Clipperton show that the sea bird colonies have made a fantastic recovery and species colonies now number in the tens of thousands of birds. So it looks as though the porcine campaign was worthwhile.



Clipperton Island

## CONSERVATION

On August 27 United States Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas issued an order enjoining work on North Lake pending final determination of our appeal now pending before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The question of litigation or mitigation is still unsettled at this time. The United States Army Corps of Engineers and County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation have given their verbal assurances that the mitigating replacement habitat would be completed before June 1, 1975, the date the county wants to begin destruction of North Lake. However, County Council has refused to make such a statement part of a legal document which would become a court order with the settlement of the law suit. This has been the last stumbling block in reaching a reasonable negotiated agreement as to the future of the wildlife at Whittier Narrows and North Legg Lake.

Conservation Meeting Oct. 18 at Plummer Park. Agenda: 1. A Malibu Lagoon Study Committee is to be formed. State Parks and Recreation has plans to develop the Malibu Lagoon area for recreational use. LAAS hopes to do a study to develop proposals which will best serve the wildlife of the lagoon. We must act now to get our input into the state while the project is still in the planning stage. Anyone who has an interest in the protection of this area will want to participate in this study.

2. The proponents and opponents of Project 17, the Wild River Initiative on the November ballot will present their viewpoints and will be open to questions from the floor. Conservationists in the Stanislaus River area are divided on both sides of the issue. Come and find out why!

Peregrine Falcon, drawing by John Schmidt.



## Trails Closed To Protect Condors

Forest Supervisor Robert G. Lancaster has announced the closing of eight miles of trails in the Los Padres Forest for use by motorized vehicles. "The closure is necessary to prevent disturbance to California condors roosting in the Mt. Pinos area of Kern and Ventura counties," Lancaster said.

Mt. Pinos is a nationally known observation site for viewing the large endangered birds as they leave and return to the mountain from feeding grounds in the valleys below.

The ridgetop trail from Mt. Pinos to Mt. Abel will be closed as well as segments of the North Fork-Lockwood Creek trail from Lilly Meadows Campground to the top at Sawmill Mountain and a segment of the San Emigdio trail from Mesa Springs to the top of the ridge near Mt. Abel.

"Our Condor Habitat Management Plan is being implemented as rapidly as we can put it into effect to help assure the protection and recovery of the condor's population. The closure of these trails is an essential part of the planned protection of the Mt. Pinos roosting area. The Forest Service, Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife and the California Fish and Game Department cooperated in developing the plan with inputs and information from interested groups such as the National Audubon Society, the National Condor Advisory Committee and others," Lancaster said.

"The above action merits the personal thanks of all members and friends concerned with both the fate of the condor and the preservation of the natural beauty of the area," said John (Denny) Sutherland, Los Padres Forest Coordinator for the Angeles Chapter.

Reprinted from "The Southern Sierran," June 1974.

# audubon activities

# Book Review

JAMES F. CLEMENTS

McGRATH STATE PARK, Aug. 25. On a beautiful summer's day nine birders met at the bridge overlooking the Santa Clara Rivermouth for a most enjoyable day's birding. In addition to the more usual shore birds, many Northern Phalaropes were seen. In all twenty-seven species of birds were noted. Bob Johnson, Leader.

MALIBU LAGOON & BIG SYCAMORE CANYON, Sept. 8. A very high tide submerged the sandbars, but gulls were plentiful, resting and bathing in shallow water, while shore birds and terns bathed and preened at the extremities of the lagoon. Two THAYER'S GULLS were pointed out, as well as a single MEW GULL, notably smaller than the RING-BILLED and HEERMAN'S, appearing as a small edition of a 1st-winter CALIFORNIA GULL with a slight bill. There were large numbers of BLACK-BELLIED and SNOWY PLOVERS with a few SEMI-PALMATED. Both COMMON and FORSTER'S TERN could be observed and compared; also, ELEGANT and CASPIAN were present. Out to sea a COMMON MURRE was swimming beyond the breakers and SOOTY SHEARWATERS were noted from time to time, as well as a couple of possible MANX, definitely whiter below. The walk up the canyon produced a large number of BREWER'S and LARK SPARROWS, with an occasional CHIPPING and BLACK-CHINNED, and AMERICAN LESSER and LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH. Some warblers were present, including a nice example of an adult male VIRGINIA'S WARBLER. In all, the 20+ birders tallied 75 species. N. John Schmitt, leader.

EVENING MEETING, Sept. 10. As a good start to the fall birding season, a large, interested audience was treated to an illustrated quiz program by Herb Clarke. Herb showed 117 excellent, definitive slides of California birds, and had everyone participate in a multiple-choice test. With that number of birds to identify in a rather limited amount of time, some of us realized that we had better get out and brush up on our field identification. After the program Audubon House was buzzing with talk and "reviews" of summer vacation trips and birding experiences, while people browsed in the library, shopped in the book store (head start for Christmas), and enjoyed delicious refreshments.

SAN CLEMENTE, Sep. 14. A couple of Least Petrels, moving with Blacks, showed the contrast in size and flight patterns. A few Leach's appeared later. Very few shearwaters were seen, Sooty and Pink-footed. We were reduced to studying Western Gulls, which at one point accompanied the boat, all of the plumages of the first four years being displayed together. A Royal tern momentarily triggered anticipation of a tropicbird. Beautiful examples of Pomerine and Parasitic Jaegers came by, but finally the trip was made by Richard Stallcup calling a Long-tailed Jaeger (with a very long tail) as it came out of the glare of the setting sun and flew by on the starboard hand.

## OLIVER TWIST

ASKED FOR MORE AND SO ARE WE! WE HAVE HAD SOME EXCELLENT HELPERS DURING THE SUMMER VACATION, BUT NOW WE NEED PEOPLE TO FILL THE JOBS VACATED BY THEM.

Phone: 876-0202

WE NEED YOU!

THANK YOU!

## BIRDS OF THE WORLD: A CHECKLIST

This book (not a folding card) fills a long-felt need for some baseline list of all the recognized species over the seven continents. Those who have tried to enlarge their World lists will attest to the colossal confusion, other than in North America and the British Isles, from different names being given to the same species by different ethnic groups and writers. So a systematic compilation and collection is very welcome. To be sure those experts in local issues may quarrel with some of the speciation, but this list is a sound point of departure.

The strength of the book lies in the fact that Mr. Clements has a substantial (2137) World list himself, compiled in very unusual, exciting and dangerous expeditions, so he has first-hand knowledge of the needs of those who wish to know what they are looking at. A must for everyone attempting to establish a World list of his own.

### SALES DEPT.

Newly revised edition of FIELD CHECKLIST OF CALIFORNIA BIRDS, by Guy McCaskie (Sept., 1974). Now available ONLY through the Sales Department of the LOS ANGELES AUDUBON SOCIETY. Be the first in your block to have one. \$40 each.

## SCARLET TANAGERS DIE IN NEW ENGLAND DURING COLD SPELL

BOSTON, June 3—Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Scarlet Tanagers perished in recent days as a cold spell in northern New England blocked their spring migration. A cold front blocked the warm southwest winds on which the Scarlet Tanagers normally migrate at this time of year.

The unseasonable cold means that the insects on which the birds normally feed have not yet hatched and the birds are starving. The Scarlet Tanager, as a rather tropical bird, has a different feather structure from, for example, the Chickadee, which winters in New England, and cannot withstand the cold.

LEADING BIRDER MAKES FIRST PAGE OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. The Sep. 14 issue of "The Wall Street Journal" had an article about Joseph Taylor, who has seen 716 North American birds. He seems to be reduced to really difficult birds, like Ross' Gull.

## WANTED

There is opportunity for a nature-oriented retired couple or single man, geared to mobile-home life, to enjoy an oak-shaded residence site on a 300 acre Nature Conservancy preserve in the Temecula area. This would be a permanent post to provide responsible caretaking in return for residence; an average of two daily hours of general property maintenance would be required—this on a salary basis.

This preserve, with fine canyons and abundant spring water sources, provides the student of nature an opportunity to extend his knowledge and share in the pleasure of cataloguing the plants and animal life of a superior chaparral community should he desire to do so. For further information please write Box 6, Temecula, Calif. 92390, including pertinent background material.

**Audubon  
Bird Reports  
874-1318**

**HEADQUARTERS, LIBRARY AND NATURE MUSEUM LOCATED AT AUDUBON HOUSE**

**PLUMMER PARK, 7377 SANTA MONICA BLVD., LOS ANGELES 90046 876-0202**

**PRESIDENT** Dr. Gerald Maisel

Audubon House Hours 10 to 3, Monday through Friday

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY** Dorothy Dimsdale

**HOUSE CHAIRMAN** Abigail King

**Thu., Oct. 3. EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.**



**Sat., Oct. 5 PELAGIC TRIP; FROM MONTEREY, led by California Field Ornithologists.** Boat leaves Sam's Wharf promptly at 7:30 a.m. and returns approximately at 4:00 p.m. Monterey Bay has surprises at any time of year. Thousands of petrels are expected to be in the bay, possibly some Fork-tailed. Price, \$11.50 for members of CFO or subscribers to "Western Birds"; others \$13.00. Send check with full names of all in party to Cliff Lyons, 4988 Northaven Ave., San Diego, CA. 92110, together with stamped self-addressed envelope. Departure information will be sent with confirmation. Clothing for cold and wet weather is always advisable.

**Sun., Oct. 6. NEWPORT BACKBAY.** Meet any time after 8:00 at lower south side of the bay. Shore-birds should have returned in numbers. Black rails have been seen on this trip, although very difficult to see. Leader, Freeman Tatum.

**Tue., Oct. 8. EVENING MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park.** Arnold Small, past president of L.A. Audubon and well-known bird photographer and author, will give a program on Birding in the Land of the Incas, from the steamy jungles to the glacier-crowned volcanos of the high Andes, illustrated with his outstanding color slides.

**Sat., Oct. 12. TIAJUANA RIVERBOTTOM** Meet at 8:00 a.m. at \_\_\_\_\_ Restaurant. Take Route 5 south to Imperial Beach turnoff, Palm Ave., and proceed 3/4 mile to Oscar's on right side of Palm. Returning fall migrants should be in abundance. Leader, Larry Sansone.

**Fri., Oct. 18. CONSERVATION MEETING, 8:00 p.m. at Plummer Park.**

**Sun., Oct. 20. GOLETA SLOUGH, SANTA BARBARA.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. Take Highway 101 north to Santa Barbara. Turn off at Cabrillo Blvd. (left-hand offramp) to bird refuge, on right just past underpass. Many shore-and land-birds should be in transit. Leader, Nelson Metcalf.

**Sat. Oct. 26-27. BUTTERBREAD SPRINGS.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Jawbone Canyon and Route 14, 20 miles north of Mojave. This trip will be over desert roads passable with caution. Desert birds, including possible Chukars. Camping at the Kelso river. Absolutely no facilities. Bring own water. Leaders, Pam & Keith Axelson.

**Thu., Nov. 7. EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Audubon House.**

**Sun., Nov. 10. McGRATH STATE PARK.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. in McGrath State Park, Ventura. Wintering shore birds and water fowl are certainties; late migrants are possibilities. Leader, George Ledec.

**Tue., Nov. 12. EVENING MEETING, 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park.** Program will be listed in November Tanager.

**Sat., Nov. 16. MALIBU LAGOON** Meet at 8:00 a.m. on west side of lagoon. Gulls, terns and shore birds should be abundant. Leader, Jim Clements.

**Thu., Nov. 21. CONSERVATION MEETING, 8:00 p.m. at Plummer Park.**

**Sat., Dec. 7-8. CARRIZO PLAINS.** Meet in center Maricopa at 8:00 a.m. Trip will depart south on Route 33 for a few miles to see LeConte's Thrashers. Sage Thrasher 71. In Carrizo plains the Sand-hill Cranes should be seen in the evening or morning. Golden Eagles, Ferruginous Hawks, Mountain Plovers usually are seen. Bald Eagle 71. Barn Owl 71. Leader,

**Nov. 9-17; Nov. 23-Dec. 1; Dec. 7-15. POINT REYES BIRD OBSERVATORY** will lead trips through one of Mexico's birding spots, including San Blas and Mazatlan. For information write or phone Meryl Stewart, P.O. Box 442, Bolinas, CA 94924, 415-868-0696 before October 10.

## REGISTRAR'S REPORT

Life Members	8
Student Members	115
Regular Members	2773
Subscribers to W. T.	126
Totals	1964
	864
	1972
	1958
	1974
	2888



*The Editor will be pleased to receive photographs or line drawings for publication in The Western Tanager. High contrast glossy prints are preferred, but we can also work from colored slides. All material will be returned after publication.*

## UCLA EXTENSION NATURE FILM SERIES

The Series, "World of the Wild", will be held in Rm 2160E of UCLA'S Dickson Art Center Friday eves, Oct. 4, Nov. 1, 8, 22, and Dec. 6, from 7:30 to 10 p.m. An afternoon lecture/screening is set for Sun. Oct. 20 from 2:30 to 5. Showings include lives of wild birds, insects marine life, killer whale and other mammals, offered in cooperation with the UCLA Media Center and Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association. Participants may earn 2 units of biology credit. Fee \$40.00 for credit and \$30.00 for non-credit. write Dept. of Biol. and Phys. Sciences, UCLA Extension, P. O. Box 24902, Los Angeles, Ca. 90024, phone: 825-3839.



**Field Trip Information:** The society cannot be responsible for transportation. Always bring binoculars and lunch. No pets or collecting permitted. On weekend trips leader is scheduled for Saturday only. The Los Angeles Audubon Society and its authorized leaders accept no responsibility for the protection or well-being of persons attending field trips, or for any accident, personal or otherwise, incurred during a society sponsored trip. For last minute changes or cancellations always call the Bird Report 874-1318 on the Friday before a scheduled trip.

## The Western Tanager

Official Publication of the  
Los Angeles Audubon Society

EDITOR . . . . . Gilbert W. King "The Western Tanager" is free to members of  
Field Notes . . . . . Shumway Suffel National Audubon Society assigned to the Los  
Audubon Activities Donald Adams Angeles chapter. For all others annual subscription is  
Calendar . . . . . Caroline Adams \$3.50. For first class mailing, send \$1.00 to Audubon  
Mailing Supervision . . Hans Hjorth House.

Rare birds are only a small part of the whole birding scene. Finding one can but add spice to a dull day, and you'll be surprised how your discovery inflates your ego out of all proportion to the real importance of the find.

**Late Observations:** Another BAR-TAILED GODWIT has been found near Eureka (third California record). A CURLEW SANDPIPER was reported at Bolinas, the same place that the Bar-tailed Godwit was seen last fall, on Sep. 8 and was still present several days later. Vivian Strumple had a SUMMER TANAGER at her home in Arrastre Canyon, near Palmdale, for two weeks in late August. Summer Tanagers were still at Morongo Valley, where they nest, on Sep. 7. Hal and Dotty Baxter's Arcadia garden hosted a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT for a week in early September. Chats are not usually garden birds in our area. A GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE was seen in Tuna Canyon, on Sep. 9 (J. Brandt et al.). On Sep. 10 Shum Suffel and Hal Baxter had 3 VIRGINIA'S and 1 TENNESSEE WARBLER as well as many more common warblers in the fennel close to the Marineland parking lot. There were also BLACK-CHINNED SPARROWS present. A final report has just come in from Ed. Navajosky who found a NORTHERN WATER-THRUSH and a VIRGINIA'S WARBLER at Malibu Lagoon on Sep. 9. On the same day he found a second Water-Thrush at Sycamore Canyon, also an AMERICAN REDSTART and a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT. At La Jolla Canyon he saw a second Virginia's and a MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER.

**Note:** The reason that the same names and places appear in this column month after month is that these are the active birders, and the places they bird, who are known to me. If you have bird observations of general interest please drop a card to me at 1105 No. Holliston Ave., Pasadena, Calif. 91104 or phone me at 797-2965.

## BIRDING 200 YEARS AGO

The Wakes, Selbourne

Sep. 28th, 1774.

...But in nothing are swifts more singular than in their early retreat. They retire, as to the main body of them, by the 10th August, and sometimes a few days sooner; and every straggler invariably withdraws by the 20th, while their congeners, all of them, stay till the beginning of October; many of them all through that month, and some occasionally to the beginning of November. This early retreat is mysterious and wonderful, since that time is often the sweetest season in the year. But what is more extraordinary, they begin to retire still earlier in the most southerly parts of Andalusia, where they can be in no ways influenced by any defect of heat; or, as one might suppose, failure of food. Are they regulated in their motions with us by a defect of food, or by a propensity to moulting, or by a disposition to rest after so rapid a life, or by what? This is one of those incidents in natural history that not only baffles our searches, but almost eludes our guesses!....Gilbert White

## THREAT TO GRAND TOURIST INDUSTRY?

The unmatched grandeur of the Grand Canyon National Park is once again being threatened, this time from the unlikely source of the Havasupai Indian Tribe. In a Senate-passed bill purportedly seeking to expand Grand Canyon lands, a House Interior Committee amendment was adopted for a transfer of 185,000 acres of Grand Canyon National Park and National Forest lands for economic purposes. This would be the first time national parklands would be cut out for this purpose. The land has little agricultural potential but does have great potential for commercial tourist development. Environmental lists are opposed to the transfer, even though it bars mining, as setting a precedent for allocations on other Indian land claims totaling over 57-million acres and for giving public lands to private groups for economic purposes. This is clearly at variance with the purposes of parks and public land usage. The bill is expected to come up for a vote in September and a floor fight to delete the objectionable amendment is anticipated.

From "Nature" Vol. 249, June 28, 1974.

## EGG COLLECTOR COLLECTED

CITIZENS of the United States are entitled under their constitution to bear arms, and they believe in using them. In addition to shooting public figures and wild game, they are also accustomed to collect any rarities they encounter "for scientific purposes". There is a conspiracy of silence over this in North America, where for example the senior ornithological journal has refused to publish any comments on reports that specimens of the first Little Gulls *Laurs minutus* and Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* found nesting in North America were promptly collected despite the fact that they are easily recognized and that there was already ample material available. Even the supposedly militant Audubon Societies have said nothing about the situation. There has, however, been a growing chorus of complaint where the same policies have been followed abroad. Many of the atrocities have been perpetrated by young and inexperienced people, brought up in an unhealthy tradition by their seniors who tend to escape the blame, so it is worthy of note that one Daniel has at least been brought to judgement in his own courts.

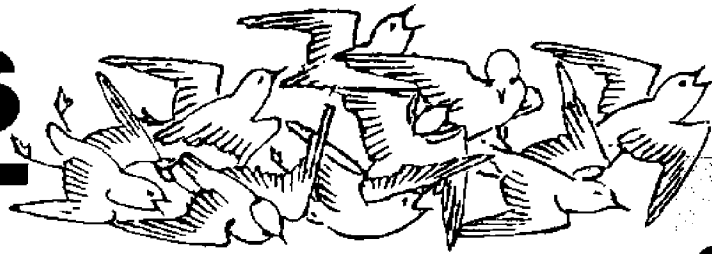
For several months now there has been an excited twittering in international ornithological circles as the news went round that Professor Charles Sibley, formerly of Cornell University and now of Yale University, who was awarded the American Ornithologists' Union's Brewster Memorial Award for the electrophoretic analysis of egg-white proteins in 1971 and subsequently elected a Vice-President, has been found participating in the international egg trade. It seems that by a skilful piece of deduction Richard Porter of the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, concluded that a local egg collector must be dealing with foreign parts, located allegedly incriminating correspondence with Professor Sibley and referred it to the American authorities. Professor Sibley's files at Yale were then inspected, with the result that on May 20 he was fined \$3,000 under the Lacey Act for six cases of "illegally importing bird parts taken abroad in violation of foreign wild life laws", five of them in Britain.

The situation is made worse by the fact that for at least fifteen years the British Home Office Advisory Committees had already been stretching the law to the limit to enable Professor Sibley to obtain material legally, and many British ornithologists had been assisting him with this. He justified his decision to exceed his allocation by telling the British *Sunday Times* (June 16) that it was an insult to his scientific standing imposed by emotional bird conservation groups with little knowledge of bird population dynamics, which he felt entitled to ignore because "the idea that taking a few eggs could endanger a species is the most ridiculous thing you could imagine . . . I say 'fine, we'll pay the penalty, but you are going to have to listen to the real experts, because you are not the real experts'".

The British Home Office Advisory Committees consist of people of a most unemotional sort who are internationally recognized to have made more important contributions to the study of population dynamics than Professor Sibley. They must have been watching the amount of material that he had already received through legal means, which is known to have been large, rather carefully, and it would be interesting to know where Professor Sibley expects to find greater "experts". It is surprising to find a person in such a responsible position at such a distinguished institution first behaving in such a way and then indulging in such an outburst when he was found out. If senior people behave like this, it is hardly surprising that the conduct of some junior American ornithologists is not all it should be. It is good to see the American authorities take the first steps towards putting their house in order. But there is still bigger game in the woods.—From W. R. P. Bourne.



# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA Birds



## Shumway Suffel



**October** as we've said so many times before, is for rare-bird watchers! The flood tide of the passerine migration peaked out in September, but the rare birds, the off-course vagrants from the north and east are not only lost, they are usually late. Also, many of them are difficult to identify. An advance study of winter and immature plumages, combined with careful field notes, made before consulting your field guides, should lead to the identification of most unusual birds. But remember, every bird does not have to be identified. As an example, a dull grayish-brown Kingbird with no yellow and no clean white in its plumage, at Marina del Rey was independently identified by three usually competent observers as an immature Tropical Kingbird, an immature Cassin's Kingbird and an immature Western Kingbird. The lesson here — don't perpetuate your uncertainty with questionable identification!

An era of avian discovery ended in mid-August when the nest of a **MARBLED MURRELET** was found by a woodcutter 150 feet up in a Douglas Fir tree near Santa Cruz, an amazing place for a seabird to nest. Such a nest site was not completely unexpected as several birders had heard their calls overhead as they flew from the ocean to the forest at night, but the actual nest could not be located. This was the last North American bird whose nest remained undiscovered. The woodcutter will receive a long standing reward for his discovery from the National Audubon Society.

An outstanding bit of field identification resulted in a rich reward for Guy McCaskie and his companions on Aug. 17. They knew they had a different "peep", among the hundreds of Westerns and Least's near Red Hill on the Salton Sea, but Guy remembered an article in *British Birds* (Jan. 1974) on field identification of small Sandpipers which stated that Semipalmated and Rufous-necked Sandpipers were virtually indistinguishable in fall except by the lack of partial webbing between the toes of the Rufous-necked. After two hours study they determined that there was no webbing between the toes and that their bird was definitely a **RUFIOUS-NECKED SANDPIPER**. The only other California Rufous-necked was photographed at Eureka last June 16 by Ron LeValley, but this identification should not have been difficult because the face, throat and upper chest are marked by rufous in breeding plumage.

Other shorebirds received a major part of the birders' attention in a rather dull August. An early **SOLITARY SANDPIPER** flew upstream at Malibu on Aug. 12, and was identified on the wing by Abigail King of the "Monday Birders". This is our only local report to early September. A very few **BAIRD'S SANDPIPERS** (always early migrants) were found — two near Pt. Mugu on Aug. 27, one near Ventura on Sept. 3, one at the north end of the Salton Sea on Aug. 13 (Harry Kreuger) and a few in Inyo Co. where they are regular in small numbers. An early **PECTORAL SANDPIPER** was seen near Pt. Mugu on Aug. 27 (Hal Baxter and Ian McGregor) and another was at Malibu on Sept. 1 (Herb and Olga Clarke). **BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS** are rare on the mainland coast south of Pismo Beach, but Jean Brandt and Ruth Lohr found two of them on the isolated breakwater at Marina del Rey on Aug. 26. Two albino shorebirds are worthy of note because

they may later be seen elsewhere and thus allow us to follow the movements of an individual bird. The first was checked brown-and-white Killdeer with a white tail at McGrath Park on Aug. 5; and the second was a lovely, shining, white Northern Phalarope, reminding us of a Fairy Tern, near Pt. Mugu on Aug. 27.

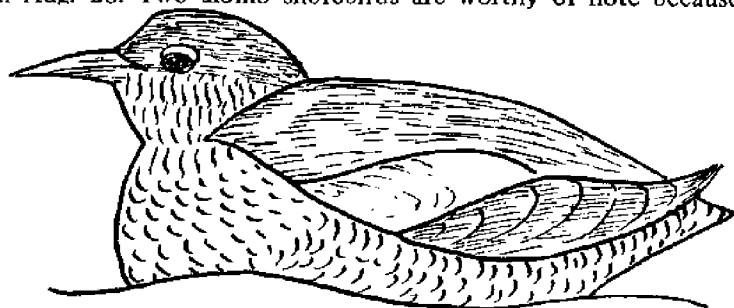
At long last a booby was found at the Salton Sea. They have not been found there since the major invasions of '71 and '72. A single **BROWN BOOBY** was seen flying near the Whitewater River dike by Ian McGregor and Steve Liston on Aug. 25 and again on Sep. 2 by Jon Dunn and Guy McC. Harry Kreuger and John Schmitt at the Sea on Aug. 13 were too early for the Booby at the north end, but did find an **OSPREY**, 3 **CLAPPER RAILS** (probably of the endangered *Yumanensis* race) and 2 **WHITE-FRONTED GEESE** which have summered there; at Red Hill they had a **FRANKLIN'S GULL** (only the second reported this year); and at Ramer Lake a **VIRGINIA'S WARBLER**.

The few birders who braved the scorching heat of the desert oases in Inyo and San Bernardino counties over Labor Day reported good numbers of western migrants, but only **RED-STARTS** and **WATERTHRUSHES** as representatives of the hoped for Eastern strays.

Locally, the passerine migration picked up a little steam as August progressed — Buntings, Grosbeaks, Ash-throated Flycatchers etc. were fairly common by mid-month, but only a trickle of the warbler migration could be discerned before September. **VIRGINIA'S WARBLERS** were found in West Los Angeles, below San Diego, and in the willows at Marina del Rey (Hal Ferris). Jean Brandt, Ruth Lohr and the Commeaus, on their way to a Sep. 4 meeting about the future of Malibu State Park, stopped at Tuna Canyon and were rewarded with the first **BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** of the season, climbing nuthatch-like up and down the tree trunks. Upper Newport Bay hosted thousands of shorebirds, hundreds of Terns, and a few early ducks, but the focus of attention was on an **OSPREY** which perched on the channel marker from mid-August into early September. At Malibu there were hundreds of terns including many Commons and Ed. Navajosky reported a single **ARTIC TERN** which was "oiled" as most or all Arctics are when found near shore (they are strictly pelagic).

In October we shall still find flocks of migrants from which to extract a few rarities. A very few **TROPICAL KINGBIRDS** are found along the immediate coast in early October. All warbler deserve a critical examination as many of our most fascinating vagrants are found in this family. Bobolinks are probably more common here than expected. Look among the sparrows in tall grass and reeds with large seedheads. Every fall flocks of sparrows may contain a rare bird, a Lark Bunting or a Clay-colored Sparrow; and among the White-crowned Sparrows particularly, a White-throate or a Harris'. Finally later in the month, try for Longspurs among the thousands of Horned Larks in the Antelope Valley, north and west of Lancaster, this requires lots of patience, an excellent ear, quick eye and strong legs.

More on page five



Marbled Murrelet