

# WESTERN TANAGER

Los Angeles Audubon Society

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## Urban Exotica

### A Sympathetic View of the Introduced Vegetation of Los Angeles.

by Les Wood



The Cedar Waxwings would never guess that the seasonal bounty of fruit and berries of the Camphor and Mulberry trees have not always been a part of the Southern California scene. There was a time when the Robins, Waxwings, and Mourning Doves could not have found this feast, even though they searched every nook and cranny of the State. Yet, today, coming into fruit in consecutive order, this harvest lasts until it seems too late for the birds to reach their nesting locales in time to raise a family. The fact is that none of these trees is native to our area, nor is the Eucalyptus, though it furnishes honey for the hummingbirds. It is truly remarkable that this relatively recently-introduced vegetation has adapted so well to our climate, and has managed to earn a place in the food chains of our local avifauna.

One must travel far afield to discover the nativity of many of the most beautiful and familiar trees found in L.A. The Camphor is native to China and Japan, and the crystalline gum, champhor, is made by distilling its wood. In spring the young reddish-tinged leaves make the Camphor quite attractive, but to see the tree after a spring rain has turned the bark black is an unforgettable experience. Good examples of the species may be seen on 6th St. and 18th St. in Santa Monica, and on DePauw St. and Toyopa Drive in Pacific Palisades. As the generic name of the Camphor implies (*Cinnamomum camphora*), it is a relative of the Indian Laurel, from the bark of which is made the spice, cinnamon.

The White Mulberry (*Morus alba*) is another native of China, and a member of the Fig family. At one time it was introduced to North America with the wildest speculation of rearing silkworms. Though nothing came of the silkworm industry, the plant, which seeds itself readily, has greatly benefitted our local birds.

From Australasia come all of the Eucalypts, members of the wide-ranging Myrtle family. Our most familiar species is the Tasmanian Blue Gum (*E. globulus*), excellent examples of which can be seen at Lincoln Park in Santa Monica.



Photo: Les Wood

Coquito Palm—MacArthur Park

This is the tree most Californians think of when "Eucalyptus" is mentioned, but several other species, native to Western Australia, have more showy flowers. Among them is the slow-growing Flame Eucalyptus (*E. ficifolia*). The large clusters of 2-inch flowers may vary in color from pink to deep crimson, with shades of salmon, orange, and scarlet. Bloom occurs in summer or at intermittent times. An arresting display may be seen along Alma Real Drive in Pacific Palisades, or along Chatauqua Blvd., interspersed with Bushy Yate (*E. lehmannii*).

Continued Overleaf



Photo: Les Wood

Dragon Tree—MacArthur Park

A very spectacular sight in Los Angeles is the bloom display of the Coral Tree (*Erythrina speciosa*), the official flowering tree of the city. It is a member of the Pea family, comprising about 430 genera and 7,000 species, including such diverse members as Liquorice of the Mediterranean, the Palo Verde of our local desert washes, the Red Bud of the Coast and Sierra foothills, and the Poinciana of East Africa. Among our Coral Trees, the Cone Flame Tree (*E. coralloides*) is suggestive of the colorful Mexican heritage of the Southland, for it was grown as an ornamental for centuries by the Aztecs. Fine specimens can be seen along Santa Monica Blvd. in Beverly Hills, at the Huntington Botanic Gardens, and on Westwood Blvd. at U.C.L.A. *Erythrina falcata*, from Brazil, has brilliant red sickle-shaped flowers in large drooping clusters. Excellent specimens may be seen at the South Coast Botanic Garden, the L.A. Arboretum, and at Plummer Park in West Hollywood. One of the oldest and best-known plantings of *Erythrina* is that in the center strip of San Vicente Blvd. in Brentwood. This tree is the Coast Kaffirbloom (*E. caffra*) from South Africa. It is deciduous, and its bright red flowers appear before the leaves in late winter.

Fan or Washington Palms furnish excellent nesting sites for Flickers and Sparrow Hawks. These trees are native to our desert areas and can be found near oases in the Colorado Desert or adjacent to the beach line of the ancient inland sea. In the early 1900's several streets of the city were lined with these palms. With the advent of the freeways and street widening, many of these were removed—though a remnant remains on So. Flower St. below Washington Blvd. Related species are the Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) from Arabia and No. Africa; the Queen Palm (*Cocos plumosa*) from Brazil; the King Palm from Australia, and the Coquito or Wine Palm from Chile. An excellent example of this rather rare palm can be seen in MacArthur Park on Parkview St. near Wilshire Blvd. The seeds of the Coquito Palm resemble diminutive coconuts, and are called coquitos in Chile.

Les Wood is past-president of Los Angeles Audubon Society. A Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, he received his botanical training at UCLA, and for 33 years was Horticultural Supervisor with the City of Los Angeles. Among his varied interests are cacti, succulents, bromeliads, and birds.

Two interesting trees, both members of the Lily family, are the Green Dracena and the Dragon Tree. This large family contains such diverse plants as the Asparagus "Ferns", the Hyacinth, the Tulip, the South African Aloes, and the Southwestern U.S. Agaves. The Green Dracena (*Cordyline australis*) is native to New Zealand. It adapts well with our local Spanish architecture, and our House Finches frequently nest in the thick leaf clusters which appear in tufts at the top of the branches. It has small white flowers in large panicles. The Dragon Tree (*Dracaena draco*), a native of the Canary Islands, may be found in Palisades Park in Santa Monica and in MacArthur Park on Parkview St. north of Wilshire. It is from this tree that the "Dragon's Blood" of the ancients was obtained, a mysterious, red resinous substance used in treating "influxes, dysenteries, spitting of blood, fastening loose teeth, and other such effects as require attrition..." The resin was thought to be the blood of the basilisk, "a mythical lizard-like monster with supposedly fatal breath and glance, fabled to have been hatched by a serpent from a cock's egg." The Roman natural historian, Pliny (ca. 61-113 AD), mentions that "the basilisk attacked an elephant and in one gulp sucked all of its blood. The weakened elephant collapsed on the basilisk and crushed it. The blood was then drawn from the basilisk, which, being a mixture of the elephant's blood and the basilisk's is superior to ordinary blood."

Another exotic member of the Lily family is the Bottle Palm, or Pony Tail, from Mexico. Known to botanists as *Nolina*, and to nurserymen as *Beaucarnia*, it is grown for its display of arching, fountain-like leaves; hence its species name of *recurvata*. The plant is very closely related to another Lily, the Yucca, and the seeds, produced in profusion, are eagerly consumed by the Band-tailed Pigeon. The Bottle Palm is capable of storing a two year's supply of water in its large buttressed trunk, so that even if it misses a season's rain, the plant can still produce a crop of seeds for the larger birds.

A tree of great beauty during the fall and winter months is the Floss Silk Tree (*Chorisia speciosa*) from Brazil. One may be seen on the First St. side of the L.A. County Courts building in the Civic Center. A very old, mature specimen is at the Bel Air Hotel in Bel Air. A member of the Bombax Family, the Floss Silk is related to the Baobab, or Monkey's Bread Tree of Africa. The Baobab furnishes habitat there for many African birds, notably the Buffalo Weaver, just as its Brazilian relative does for the garden birds of L.A.

While we may at times regret that the process of urbanization has altered the native habitats of our area, we are fortunate that man in his desire to endow our arid environment with a little color has provided such a bounty for our local birds.

## Recommended References

1. George T. Hastings, *Trees of Santa Monica*.
2. Mildred E. Mathias (Ed.), *Color for the Landscape*.
3. Howard E. McMinn and Evelyn Maino, *An Illustrated Manual of Pacific Coast Trees* (1937).
4. *Sunset Western Garden Book* (1967).

## The Santa Fe Dam

# Something for Everyone?

There are encouraging signs that at least some governmental agencies charged with land development decisions are growing increasingly sensitive to environmental values. The best current example is the proposed joint venture between the Army Corps of Engineers and the L.A. County Parks and Recreation Department to create a \$12 million multi-use Recreation Area upon 1000 acres of gravelly flood plain behind the Santa Fe Dam. The project is located in Azusa near the conjunction of the San Gabriel and Foothill Freeways, a locale noted primarily for its colossal sand-and-gravel plants. Included in the draft Master Plan is a 70-acre angling-swimming-and-boating lake, a 340-acre picnic area, 10 acres of equestrian trails, 30 acres for tennis and baseball, and a 10-mile bikeway. But the gratifying thing about the plan is that it also calls for setting aside 400 acres of prime coastal sage and upland chaparral habitat as a protected "Wildlife Management Area."

This 400-acre tract embraces probably the finest example of coastal desert sage still extant in the L.A. urban area, a remnant of the vegetation type that once covered much of the basin. In fact, this particular association is distinctive enough today to warrant nomination by biologist T. L. Hanes of Cal State-Fullerton for inclusion in the National Registry of Natural Landmarks. Whipple Yucca, Cholla, Prickly Pear, and Hedgehog Cactus thrive in profusion here, along with Calif. Buckwheat, Yerba Santa, and Calif. Sagebrush—and the list of birds logged for the area totals 161 species, including the Golden Eagle, White-tailed Kite, 10 species of flycatchers, 5 woodpeckers, 6 swallows, 5 hummingbirds, 5 wrens, 13 warblers, and no less than 25 finches and sparrows. In particular, the area hosts a number of species now uncommon near the city—birds like the Burrowing Owl, the Black-throated Sparrow, the Cactus Wren, and the Roadrunner.

How this piece of aboriginal L.A. came to be preserved is an engaging story. In 1949, when the Santa Fe Dam was built to contain the San Gabriel River's periodic floods, the region behind the Dam was agricultural and residential. Today the ruins of streets and farm buildings may still be seen here and there in the area. But by and large, as a result of 26 years of benign neglect, the natural community has managed to vigorously reassert itself, evolving in these few decades to a near-climax state—a suggestion of what we might expect if one day mankind decides to abandon L.A.)

In the current Master Plan, the sports and picnic facilities would be relegated to "distressed" land below the 50-year flood line. The construction of these facilities involves clearing a biologically-uninteresting area dominated by weedy Field Mustard, while the upland chaparral-coastal sage community, located above the 50-year flood line, would be left undisturbed except for the construction of 3 miles of trails and a small Interpretive Center (to be manned by naturalists from the Dept. of Parks and Recreation). The lake would serve as a natural buffer between the "wild" area and the picnic sites. Pending approval of the plan by the

County Board of Supervisors, construction of the first (\$5 million) phase of the project would begin in 1976. This phase includes the Wildlife Area, which should open to the public by the end of the year.

What is unusual about all this is that the decision to protect the wild habitat was reached without the necessity of a single environmentalist losing his temper. Perhaps it has something to do with the pressure applied last year in our Whittier Narrows campaign. Or perhaps it's better than that. It could be a sign of a change in the mood of the times.

But one thing is certain: surely twenty years ago the entire region would have been plowed up for a picnic ground—while today, the Corps and the County profess an eagerness to "preserve and enhance the natural environment, to afford man an opportunity to renew his relationship with nature."

How much of this will translate into actual deeds, and how much is mere press-agentry? It is an encouraging sign that the Corps has seen fit to involve LAAS and the Sierra Club in the preliminary stages of their plans. Already our Board has made recommendations for limiting the extent of hiking trails and maintaining the north side of the lake in a natural state—and more input is anticipated in the future. In a sense, then, if the plan fails to meet its goals, we will be at least partly to blame—and that's exactly as it should be.

At this point it seems possible that the project may prove to be a model for enlightened, balanced land use; and it could presage a new era of cooperation between the County, the Corps, and the Southern California environmentalists.

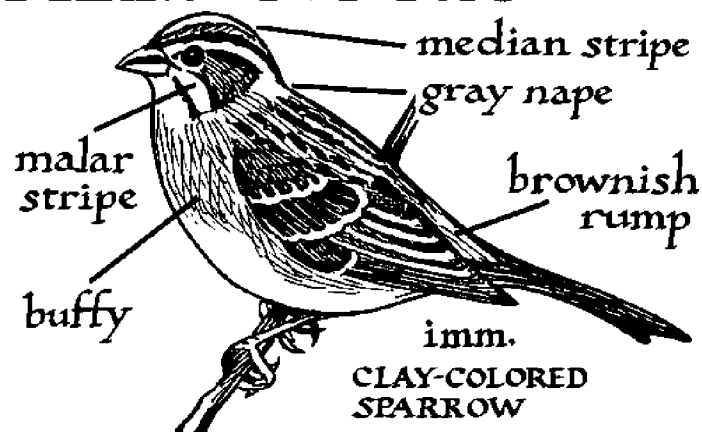
To provide a better perspective on the potentials of the area, a field trip to the Santa Fe Dam is scheduled for Nov. 8. See the CALENDAR for details. ☉

—B.C.



Jon Dunn

## FIELD NOTES



**D**uring the fall the active observer has undoubtedly encountered flocks of small long-tailed sparrows that are commonly referred to as *Spizellas*. While the bulk of the birds are **Chipping Sparrows**, a fair proportion are **Brewer's Sparrows**. In addition, the **Clay-colored Sparrow** has been found annually in small numbers every fall since 1963. Due to the similar appearance of these three species and because of the fact that they often occur together, a review of their plumage characteristics seems warranted. Before attempting to identify a Clay-colored Sparrow, I urge one to thoroughly familiarize himself with the various plumages of the Chipping and the Brewer's Sparrows.

From late August through October, the Chippy comes in two very distinct plumages. The immature is heavily streaked on the entire underparts (strongest on the breast). This heavy streaking is diagnostic of this species, as the immature plumages of the other two are essentially unstreaked. As the fall wears on, the streaking gradually fades out, until by late October many have become clear-breasted. The diagnostic mark for both the adults and the immatures is the *gray rump*. This mark, though, is very difficult to see as they seldom part their wings as the field guides illustrate. The gray rump is best seen in flight. The adult Chippy tends to be very gray below and a reddish-brown above. In the fall, the rusty brown cap is divided by a whitish median stripe.

The Brewer's Sparrow has creamier underparts than the Chipping Sparrow, and the upperparts are of a lighter, more sandy-brown color, lacking the rusty tones. I find the cap of the Brewer's Sparrow to be a very good mark. It is darkish brown with a number of *vertical blackish streaks*. The paler median stripe of the Clay-color and the Chippy is absent. The Brewer's also has a *thin whitish eye ring* which the other two species lack.

The Clay-colored Sparrow is by far the brightest of the three. The upperparts are of a *goldish-buff* color. The crown is darker and like the fall adult Chipping Sparrow it has a thin white median line. By far the best mark on a Clay-color is the *slate gray nape*, which boldly contrasts with the back and crown. The immatures (most that occur in California are of this type) have buffy breasts and flanks. Furthermore, when viewing them from the side I have always noted a white malar stripe, which contrasts to some degree with the more buffy underparts. The adults are more of a clean white below than the other two species. They also tend to have more boldly outlined ear patches. Like the Brewer's Sparrow they also have pale brownish rumps.

## BOOKS

**DOÑANA—SPAIN'S WILDLIFE WILDERNESS** by Juan Antonio Fernandez. Taplinger Publishing Co., 1975. (\$29.95).

It is difficult to imagine how Europe and North Africa must have appeared before centuries of man's exploitation had leveled the forests and altered the face of the land forever. In terms of wildlife, a view of Spain's Coto de Doñana National Park probably gives us only an inkling of the abundance of the past. Situated on the Atlantic coast where the Iberian Peninsula almost touches Africa, the dunes, forests and marshlands of Doñana are home year-round for a great number of mammal and bird species, including the rare European lynx and the Spanish Imperial Eagle. Each year the area is visited by great flocks of migratory birds from both Europe and Africa, and is recognized as perhaps the last European refuge of the pink Flamingo. Obviously this is an area that demands much study and understanding, for time is running out for many of its wild inhabitants.

By the author's own admission a place such as the Coto de Doñana cannot be adequately described by mere words; its essence cannot be captured on paper. But still, the attempt has been made. Unfortunately what emerges is a curious jumble of history, anecdote and personal observation. The historical portion may be confusing to an average American reader without perspective on Spanish history or knowledge of names and relationships of European nobility. In the remainder of the text many subjects seem to be approached, but few adequately covered.

Perhaps owing to translation, the language is often difficult. Combinations of words that may have sounded beautiful in the original Spanish, in English often become just overly romantic metaphor and flowery description.

The greatest value of the book is to be found in its illustrations, including maps, reproductions and photographs, all of high quality. The photographs are generally superb, and only two or three out of over 140 are marred by slight problems in printing registration or by a less-than-adequate negative.

Also of great value is a detailed list of the zoological species to be found in the park and a rather complete bibliography of works on the subject dating from the mid-nineteenth century. (Many of the listed works may be available only in Spanish.) This may be an important book for anyone desiring knowledge about the wildlife of that part of the world, but should be considered only as a starting point. Many other sources should be considered to gain a real understanding of this "most important bird reserve" in Europe.

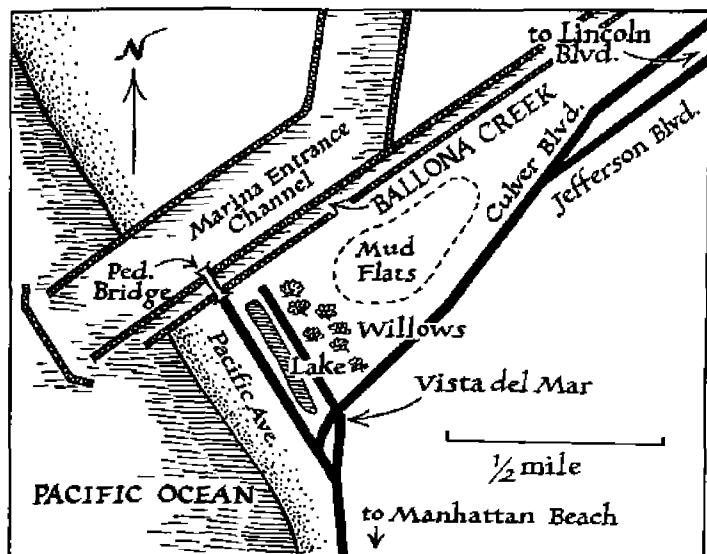
—Charles J. Sutton

All books reviewed in this column are available at Audubon House, open Mon.-Fri. 10-3 pm. LAAS members and Tanager subscribers are entitled to a 10% discount on all books over \$5.00. Mail and phone orders are welcomed.



Jean Brandt

## BIRDING at the Marina



Marina del Rey is the result of dredging, filling and otherwise "improving" what used to be perfectly good marshland. Fortunately, birds adapt rather easily, and the area is one of the best places locally to bird in late fall and winter. The entire harbor should always be checked. (A Red-necked Grebe was seen from the dining tables in one of the restaurants in the village!) However, on the south side of Ballona Creek, in Playa del Rey, you will have your best chances to see unusual birds, since there are five distinct habitats, supporting as many different communities of birds.

Drive west on Culver Blvd. to Pacific Ave. and turn north (right) to the end of Pacific Ave. Park your car and walk across bridge; turn left. Walk and bird your way to the end of the jetty. During fall and winter you should see Surf-birds and Wandering Tattlers—and just last year, a Ruff was found. A spotting 'scope is essential if you want to check the break-water, where there are many Brown Pelicans, gulls and usually a few Black Oystercatchers. Also check the harbor entrance, especially after storms, when you may find alcids, all three scoters, loons and grebes.

Walk back on the jetty, but do not cross the bridge. Continue along the bike path, as this is your best vantage point from which to check the creek and its banks. This is the usual place to see our resident Harlequin Duck, and many shorebirds, terns and gulls are also found here. Walk back and cross the bridge; turn east (left) and walk past the apartment buildings. From here you will see the willows, which are directly behind the apartments. You have to go around a fence, but the willows are famous for vagrants and during fall migration are usually swarming with birds. This area is a MUST when you are in the area. Such birds as the Eastern Kingbird, Gray Vireo and many warblers including the Prairie, have been found here.

Again, return to the bridge but be sure to check the pond on Pacific Ave. as many ducks winter here, including the Greater Scaup (they are usually with Lesser Scaup and since you can get very close to them, you should be able to see each distinguishing characteristic). A Ross' Goose wintered at the pond in '71-'72.

East of the willows you will have seen extensive mudflats. These are best checked by walking in from Culver Blvd. Shorebirds abound here and usually you will see a few Golden Plovers. Other birds found here frequently are White-tailed Kites and Short-eared Owls. (Many of these areas are posted "No Trespassing," and LAAS does not recommend breaking the law—so you will have to use your Birdwatcher's Intuition to figure out the best way to see the birds!)

Two miles east of Pacific Ave. off Jefferson Blvd., you come to Alla St. Turn north (left) and drive to the end (one block). Park and walk along the creek. This is a very good spot to look for gulls and terns, and the Franklin's and Mew Gulls have both been seen here.

Restaurants, stores and amusement centers are found in the village and this is a good place to leave the non-birding members of your family. Gasoline and motels are nearby and the Los Angeles Airport is only three miles south. Rapid Transit provides bus service to the area, but be prepared to walk a lot. ☺

## Sage Sparrow



Illustration by Mary Ellen Pereyra

The Sage Sparrow, *Amphispiza belli*, was first described by the noted systematist, John Cassin, from a specimen collected in California in 1849 by New York taxidermist, John Graham Bell, a close friend of Audubon. It is a near relative of the desert-dwelling Black-throated Sparrow, *Amphispiza bilineata*, and undoubtedly diverged from it during relatively recent times. The species resides year-round in the arid regions of our coastal chaparral, usually in association with low stands of Chamise (*Adenostoma*) or Saltbush (*Atriplex*). At one time it was considered a characteristic bird of this area, but with agricultural and urban development, its range has become limited and fragmented. Still, there are a few places nearby where you may count on finding them. La Jolla Canyon, just above Big Sycamore, is a promising spot, as is Lake Mathews, the Maricopa area along Interstate 5, and Soda Lake on the Carrizo Plain. Watch for the white spot below the ear, the dark tail which it flicks habitually—and in spring listen for the dry, tinkling song. ☺

Jean Brandt

## BIRDS of the Season



November birding gradually winds down to a slow and predictable pace after the frantic days of fall migration. Ducks, geese and shorebirds have settled into their wintering grounds and passerines have returned to backyard feeders, golf courses and parks; however there are many interesting possibilities for the determined birdwatcher, with some of California's most notable rarities (Groove-billed Ani, Thick-billed Kingbird, Olivaceous Flycatcher, etc.) having been found at this time. The Tufted Duck should be looked for at Lake Sherwood, the Sharp-tailed Sparrows at Upper Newport and the Piping Plover or even a King Eider at Malibu. A trip to Death Valley is always worthwhile at this time of year, when you may find such birds as the Tree and Harris' Sparrows or possibly Lapland or Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Big Sycamore Canyon consistently has its share of good birds, as do the Malibu Lagoon, Tapia Park and Legg Lake. California Condors should be fairly easy to find in the late afternoon at the Edmonston Pumping Station, which is east of the town of Grapevine.

And let's not forget backyard birding. Betty Jenner writes of the return of ten Cedar Waxwings (Sept. 21) to her garden near Exposition Park. She also saw a Willow Flycatcher and Western Tanagers during the same week. Abigail King had an amazing selection of birds on her hill in West Los Angeles this past month, including a Lapland Longspur, two Black Swifts (with many Vaux'), both gnatcatchers, and MacGillivray's, Hermit and Townsend's Warblers. A Tennessee Warbler (Sept. 11) and Northern Waterthrush (Sept. 19) in the UCLA Botanical Garden (Kimball Garrett) demonstrated that school can be fun. Roland Hull saw an Osprey from his office window in Malibu Sept. 18 and Freeman Tatum saw an unidentified magpie (escape?) at his office in Santa Monica the same day. With gas prices as high as they are today, perhaps we should spend more time looking out of the window.

September pelagic trips are always good and this year was no exception. The San Diego trip to San Clemente Island on the 13th had four Red-billed Tropicbirds and both Leach's and Least Petrels. The Santa Barbara trip on the same day to Anacapa Island landed on the island for one hour only, but the birds proved very cooperative. There was a Red-breasted Nuthatch (feeding on barnacles!), an American Redstart, a Tennessee Warbler and a most unusual Philadelphia Vireo. Normally the Philadelphia Vireo is considered to be "accidental" (up to 1970 there were only seven records for the state), however this bird was one of three seen this month in California: one very tame bird at the Pt. Loma Cemetery in San Diego (Sept. 19-23) and one near Ferndell in Humboldt Co. The Sept. 27 trip to San Clemente Island did not produce the hoped-for tropicbird, but excellent views of a Flesh-footed Shearwater gave many people a "life bird". One Manx Shearwater was also spotted and two Craveri's Murrelets were seen by those on the front of the boat.

Every "big bird in the sky" should be checked thoroughly. Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin were very pleased to find an adult Broad-winged Hawk soaring over Tuna Canyon with some Red-tails. An immature Zone-tailed Hawk was found in the Tia Juana Riverbottom Sept. 18-19 and one wonders how many of these birds are passed off as "just another Turkey Vulture"? Golden Eagles are not common in Southern California but there are three birds which are seen daily over the San Diego Wild Animal Park near Escondido. White-tailed Kites are also seen and a Road-runner was in with the rhinos and giraffes recently, looking far more exotic than usual. Ospreys were seen at Upper Newport, Marina del Rey, Tapia Park, McGrath, Malibu, and the Long Beach Recreation Park, where Rusty Scalf found one perched high in a Eucalyptus tree.

Shorebirds have been plentiful this fall with even the uncommon ones—Solitary, Pectoral and Baird's—reported frequently. On Sept. 9, Shum Suffel and Hal Baxter had 25 species (of shorebirds) at McGrath and on Sept. 28, there were 20, thus proving McGrath to be a major stopover on the Pacific Flyway. Ed Navajosky led a field trip there that day and had a total of 83 species including a Palm Warbler. One Red Phalarope remained in the lagoon for ten days and Parasitic Jaegers were seen overhead almost daily. Red Knots were also common and on Sept. 8, Navajosky saw thousands of Sooty Shearwaters over the beach at 1:00 p.m. on a clear day. Golden Plovers were seen at Ballona Creek (off Alla St., Fred Heath, Sept. 14) and at McGrath (E.N., Sept. 22). A Solitary Sandpiper was found at Legg Lake (Dave Foster, Sept. 11) and two were at Tapia Park (Sandy Wohlgemuth, Sept. 15). The Stilt Sandpiper is very rare along the coast, so the one seen on the rocks at Avila Beach (north of Morro Bay) on Sept. 10 was a real treat for Joan Mills and Abigail K.

Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers have been plentiful this fall but the only Long-tailed Jaeger was seen by Shirley Wells from shore at the most southeasterly point of Long Beach Harbor. Wells says that this is an excellent viewing spot as the birds follow the fishing boats into the Harbor. The only interesting gulls were the two Black-legged Kittiwakes at the Malibu Lagoon on the 1st (Bruce Broadbooks) and the immature Franklin's which Jerry Johnson saw in Ballona Creek (off Alla St., Sept. 7). Many Arctic Terns were seen on the Sept. 6 pelagic trip but the only ones seen onshore were the two at the Malibu Lagoon (F.H., Sept. 7) which were flying and resting with a mixed flock of Common and Forster's. A Black Tern was found at Marina del Rey (Hank B.) on Sept. 26 and was there at the end of the month.

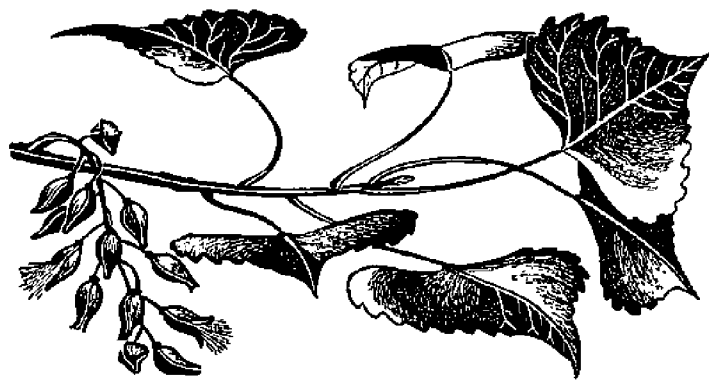
Birding in the remote desert oases is a specialty of Pam and Keith Axelson and their favorite place is the Butterbread Springs—Kelso Creek area, which is 20 miles north of Mojave. On Sept. 13, they had a Yellow-billed Cuckoo at Kelso Creek and on the 27th, there were 15 Evening Grosbeaks, 20 Pinyon Jays and a male American Redstart. Over the years, the Axelsons have had a total of 178 species in this region and are working very hard to preserve it as a natural area.

By all indications, the new ponds at Legg Lake will be as good as or better than the old North Lake. On Sept. 5, Mike San Miguel saw 4 Chimney, 12 Vaux' and 1 White-throated Swift, plus all of the swallows except Cave and Violet-green, flying overhead. On the 30th, Foster counted 11 Bobolinks in the grasses.

An Eastern Kingbird was found near the willows at Marina del Rey (Hank B., Sept. 5) and three were at the Goleta Sewage Ponds (Brad Schram, Sept. 13). The only Tropical Kingbird was the one at the Malibu Lagoon on Sept. 18 (R. H). Best of all was the Great-crested Flycatcher, seen by Guy McCaskie on the 19th in the Pt. Loma Cemetery. The bird was observed for only 15 minutes by McCaskie but it was "heart attack time" an hour later when a *Myiarchus* was spotted by several anxious birders and turned out to be a very disappointing Ash-throated. The rare Least Flycatcher is being identified with increasing frequency in California. A single bird was at Border Park (at the west end of Monument Road in the Tia Juana River-bottom) on Sept. 28-29. However, this species is very similar to our Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers, and one should exercise extreme caution when dealing with this difficult genus.

Mountain birds are coming down early this fall with Red-breasted Nuthatches everywhere and Mountain Chickadees common in the foothills. Local warbler migration got off to a good start on the 1st when Brodtkin found 2 American Redstarts at Big Sycamore. Subsequently, a Northern Waterthrush (Barry Clark, Sept. 10), a very rare Connecticut Warbler (Hal Ferris, et al, Sept. 15-22), a Chestnut-sided Warbler and a Blackpoll (Marge and Sandy Wohlgemuth, Sept. 27) and a Black and White Warbler (M. & S.W., Sept. 28) were seen at Sycamore along with a Yellow-breasted Chat which has stayed since Sept. 15, and a daily selection of Yellow, Townsend's, MacGillvray's, Wilson's and more Redstarts. Pt. Fermin had a Redstart on the 13th and an Ovenbird (in the petunias!) on the 25th (S. Wells). The Pt. Loma Cemetery is a natural trap for vagrants and McCaskie found a female Painted Bunting and a Red-eyed Vireo there on the 11th; Johnson found a Bay-breasted and a Tennessee Warbler on the 12th; Brandt counted five American Redstarts on the 19th; and Jon Dunn reports an Ovenbird, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, an immature Broad-winged Hawk and an Orchard Oriole on the 30th.

The Monday Birders found a female Orchard Oriole at Sycamore on the 15th and many were surprised to see just how small the bird is. It was our pleasure to be able to give Hank B. a life bird, since he is singularly responsible for most of the rare birds sighted there last year. On Sept. 16, Johnson found a female Scott's Oriole (rare along our coast) in the willows at Marina del Rey. Red Crossbills are very difficult to locate, so the 6 that Ferris saw at Iris Meadow on Mt. Pinos (Sept. 26) gave him a much sought-after life bird.



Pt. Fermin had many sparrows, with the first Clay-colored of the season on the 13th and the Lark, Black-throated and Sage Sparrows on the 25th (S. Wells) of special interest. Rufous-crowns are common at Sycamore, but the single immature Black-chinned (Ruth Lohr, Sept. 17) may indicate that a few will winter there again. In doing this column, we have discovered that everyone's favorite bird (discounting "lifers") is the first White-crowned Sparrow of the winter. Many people have called these last days of September (including Hans Hjorth from San Clemente) to say, "MY White-crowns have just returned", with great pride and proprietary interest. For the record, the first ones reported were 3 immatures at Sycamore on the 15th.

To summarize, Big Sycamore Canyon had the most birds, but it also had the most birders. Rare birds were scarce, but October lies ahead and some of our best accidentals and vagrants straggle through late. Our best wishes to the Suffels and the Baxters on their jaunt to Australia and New Zealand—may they see ALL the birds. ☺



## WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Barry Clark

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# CALENDAR

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library, and Nature Museum are located at Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 90046. Telephone: 876-0202. Audubon House hours: 10-3, Monday through Friday.

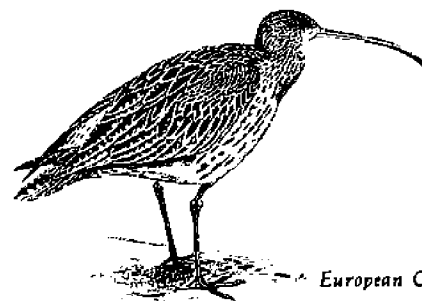
**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6—Executive Board Meeting,**  
8:00 pm., Audubon House.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8—Santa Fe Dam.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Dam Tender's house. Take the San Gabriel River Fwy. (605) north to Live Oak Ave., then go west on Live Oak to Arrow Hwy. Turn right and take Arrow Hwy. to the Tender's house, on your left against the Dam. This is an opportunity to get a glimpse of the unique upland sage habitat behind the Dam, and its interesting bird community. Raptors, Cactus Wrens, semi-desert species are likely. Leader: Dean Harvey.

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9—McGrath State Park.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the entrance to the park. Parking is available within the park at a fee, or free on the north side of the bridge over the Santa Clara River. This area is excellent for wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Leader: John Schmitt.

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11—Evening Meeting,** 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Renowned birder, Herb Clarke, will present a slide program entitled, "Colombia: Birding High and Low." The program will deal with the trip which Herb and his wife, Olga, led to South America this August. On that trip they saw 339 species of birds, including 51 tanagers and 44 hummingbirds.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15—Malibu Lagoon & Big Sycamore Canyon.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the supermarket parking lot north of Malibu Creek bridge. The group will bird this area to 11:00 a.m., then depart for Big Sycamore to eat lunch and bird the canyon. This trip promises to provide a variety of birds from wintering shorebirds and waterfowl to chaparral residents. Leader: Glenn Olson.



European Curlew

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19—Conservation Meeting,** 7:45 p.m., Santa Monica Library. An important program on the California Condor Recovery Plan and Team, presented by John Borneman, National Audubon's Condor Naturalist and Recovery Team member, and Sandy Wilbur, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, originator of the Plan, and Team member. Attention will focus on the current status of the Condor and its future. This meeting will be held in the auditorium of the main branch of the Library, at 6th St. and Santa Monica Blvd. Everyone is welcome. Pamela Axelson, Conservation Chairman.

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4—Executive Board Meeting,**  
8:00 p.m., Audubon House.

**SAT.-SUN., DECEMBER 6-7—Carrizo Plain.** Take Hwy. 5 north to State 166 (Maricopa turn-off), go west on 166 to Maricopa, turn south on Hwy 33, 1.6 miles to Elkhorn Grade Rd. The group will meet here at 8:30 a.m. to look for Le Conte's Thrasher. Be sure to have a full tank of gas before leaving Maricopa to begin trip. Sandhill Cranes should be seen in the afternoon. Other possibilities are Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Mountain Plover, Sage Thrasher, Bald Eagle, Barn Owl, and Short-eared Owl. Leader: to be announced.

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9—Evening Meeting,** 8:00 p.m., Plummer Park. Program to be announced in the December Tanager.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13—Upper Newport Bay.**

*Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318*

## Field Trip Information

The Society regrets that it cannot be responsible for transportation. Always bring binoculars and lunch. No pets or collecting permitted. On weekend field trips, leaders are responsible for Saturday only. The Los Angeles Audubon Society and its authorized leaders cannot accept responsibility for the protection or well-being of persons attending field trips, or for any accidents, personal or otherwise, incurred during a sponsored trip. For last minute changes or cancellations, always call the BIRD REPORT (874-1318) on the Friday before the trip. For further information regarding any field trip, call the Field Trip Chairman, Pamela Axelson: 474-6205 (evenings).

Los Angeles Audubon Society  
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