

# WESTERN TANAGER

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## The Big Day

by Terry Clark

**A**pril, 1976. Jon Dunn has spring fever. Why else would he be thinking of trying to beat the Big Day record? 201 species of birds in 24 hours, that's where it stands—a formidable feat achieved by two separate teams of California birders. Texas had a higher count a few years back, but that was prior to the American Birding Association's new ruling: 95% of all species must be seen or heard by all participants. So the team has got to be first rate.

Four seems like a good number. Four sets of eyes, four sets of ears. Kimball Garrett, his are legendary. Van Remsen can do bird calls—you should hear his Spotted Owl. Then there's Paul Lehman, sophomore up at Santa Barbara; he's a bit younger than the rest—and he's from back East—but he's good.

Jon plans to hit the habitats surrounding San Diego. Expectations are running high, for few areas of the country offer such diverse bird communities. The date, April 25, is synchronized to spring migration. The 394-mile course is calculated, charted, studied. Now only to endure. And beat the record.

These four young men epitomize the energy and expertise of birding's newest heroes. On this particular day, Kimball Garrett and Van Remsen are actually competing with themselves, having been part of the team that combed Northern California to come up with the official count of 201. On the way up to Mt. Palomar, they laugh about the last Big Day, when everyone agreed to split the cost of speeding tickets. But this scene's pretty loose—for the moment.

Owling at Mt. Palomar at midnight. Shrinking patches of snow barely outline the vagueness of a trail. It's moonless, it's cold. And everyone, for some reason or other, has been up since six or seven in the morning. If you can recognize the yawn, you'll know who's standing next to you. Otherwise forget it. Flashlights are switched on only when an owl comes near. 12:35. No flashlights yet. Van's throat is dry from all the hooting. Kimball cracks a joke, "This isn't a good time of year for singing Saw-whets." Just then it calls. Everybody freezes. Yes! It's above! No, over to the left! Put the flashlight up to your eye and guide it from there. OK, OK, there it is!

By 1:15 the team has added Spotted, Great Horned, Screech, and Pygmy. But fatigue is gaining on them fast. And some twenty hours still to go! In the car, each man knows he's got to stay awake—in case the guy behind the wheel nods off.



photo: Terry Clark

The Big Day grinds to a halt. Jon Dunn, Van Remsen, and Paul Lehman dig Jon's car out of a ditch.

On the road to Brawley and the Salton Sea, the birders fight sleep by trying for a Barn Owl. At 2:40 Kimball sights the bird on a wire. Got it? Got it! Now for the Poor-will.... Three stops and nothing. This is taking too much time. OK Van, try once more. What was that? Listen, everybody, listen! And don't breathe. Whoever's wearing that squeaky jacket, don't breathe! It'll call again. It's got to.... A few minutes of eternity go by. There it goes! Got it? Got it! Then silence again, except for someone's heart pounding against a squeaky leather jacket.

Three hours after sun-up 88 species have been added to the list. Now a quick side-trip to the "old lady's house" for a Robin that Jon and Van anticipate. Not an easy bird to get this time of year: most have departed for higher ground, cooler air. Understandably. Just 7:20 a.m. and already you can feel the threat of the Imperial Valley at high noon. After all, this parched piece of California is one of the hottest spots on earth. But it's also a gridiron of irrigation canals which bring precious water to the Valley's fertile soil. Here, among the marshes and the mud flats, a good number of shorebirds and fresh-water fowl can be counted on. But first, the Robin.

The troop covers the old lady's yard with casual efficiency, scanning past piles of junk and vegetation dense with negligence. Twice around before the Robin's found—one

Continued Overleaf

destitute, scraggly-looking bird. Against the shambles of the house, the Robin seems a perfect proof of environmental adaptation. But, scraggly or not, it pushes the total to 89.

11:35 a.m. The Anza-Borrego Desert is windy. Luck, however, is riding with the team, and they get their desert species, including a bonus Golden Eagle that Paul spots as a smudge against the sky. Everybody's feeling good. There's nothing that can stop them now. Except the ditch that Jon has just backed into.

So much for the Big Day. The rear end of the station wagon suspended from three spiny yuccas, the rear wheels hanging just above the gully. Ten minutes of huffing and puffing and the car doesn't budge. Jon dashes off to a house up on the ridge—though hope looks pretty slim. Logic tells the team that it's all over, but momentum keeps them going. Kicking and tugging at the yuccas, Kimball falls victim to the plant's stiletto-sharp defenses. But somehow the obstacles have been cleared away by the time Jon's back with help: two burly guys who look like ORV enthusiasts. Never mind, they carry shovels.

A little blood, a lot of sweat, but only 47 minutes lost. By 12:56, the Big Day is back in gear.

It's nearly 2 o'clock and the birders have been going without stop, feeding on adrenalin. Every time another species makes the list, a dose of energizing hormone shoots into the bloodstream: biological reward. No wonder birdwatching appears addictive.

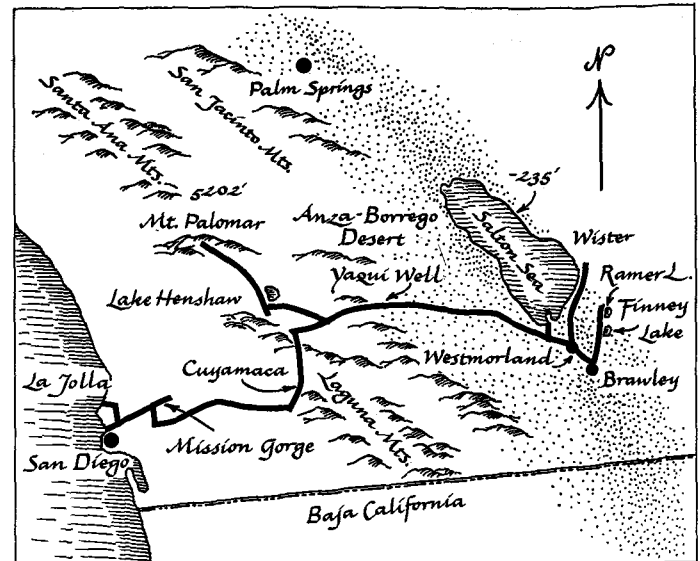
As long as there's a song to recognize, or plumage to identify, the team is in top form. They collected fourteen mountain species up in Cuyamaca's pine-tree forest, but right now things are quiet in the car.

Paul and Kimball crash. Then Van, thank heavens, saves the day. He spots a bird from his back-seat lookout, and yells, "Red-shouldered Hawk!"—just in time to wake up Jon, who has succumbed to sleep, despite determined efforts to stay alert at the wheel. Who says this sport is safe?

By the time the birders get to Mission Gorge, just after 4 p.m., the pace has picked up once again—accelerated, actually, to a steady run. Running for the Canyon Wren—which they fail to get; running for the Savannah and the Grasshopper Sparrows; running past picknickers, over stumps and rock piles and embracing lovers. Four young men in a big hurry. To the befuddled bystanders, any number of explanations might seem possible, except for the binoculars. How do you reckon with that?

At last the ocean, the final stretch. At 5:40 p.m. the score sheet reads 180 species—but light is fading fast. And visibility is... well, it could be worse. Van's got his telescope ready for those moving dots out there. OK, here they go! Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater. And over there: Western Gull, Sanderling, Horned Grebe... But not a single Heermann's Gull. Paul knew they'd miss a dumb one. The tide is up and so that's that: don't expect a Heermann's at high tide.

The residents of San Diego are turning on their lights, but the birders keep on going: Parasitic Jaeger 199, Red-breasted Merganser 200, Red-throated Loon 201... That ties the record! Now do it! Manx Shearwater! That is it! But the moment slips by with no hoorah. There's no time to celebrate while silhouettes can still be added to the list.



The Making of the Big Day

On a cliff above the ocean at La Jolla comes the final test. Van's got a bird in his scope—and it might be a Black Turnstone. Can anyone make out white speckling on the side of the breast? Does anyone else even see the bird? The group dashes off across the cliffs for a better view. Debates ensue. But careful, dogged observation brings in the decision. As Kimball concludes, "If it's not just your ordinary blackbird, it's the Turnstone." Yes indeed! Make that 207!

On the way to Jon's apartment, spirits soar. 207, in spite of the desert ditch! And only three of the species were not seen by all four birders. Van struggles with his conscience momentarily. By claiming 207, he could set a new individual record for the most species seen in a single day. But he doesn't feel completely comfortable about a Hermit Warbler he counted back at Cuyamaca. Deciding against it, he comes down to 206, a record he'll have to share with Paul. Talk about integrity—how's that for a champ!

It's 7:10 and everybody's spaced—with exuberance and with fatigue. They've logged almost 400 miles since midnight, but they've done it! They've broken the record, and—"We're out of gas..." Out of—? Well, why not!

Jon, who has driven past a dozen stations in the last five minutes, trudges off. The rest pass the time reviewing the events of the day, already history. Where the devil was the Vesper Sparrow? And the Green-tailed Towhee? Of course, there was no way to get a Downy, not in San Diego County—just too scarce. But, hey, what about those two Lewis' Woodpeckers that flew right over the car? And the Osprey miles from water! Win a few, lose a few.

Paul, however, is still muttering about the Heermann's Gull when Jon gets back, carrying a bottle of gasoline. "The guy at the station said I should pour some of this into the carburetor..." He's met with only blank stares. Kimball, Paul, and Van have been dealing with distinctions all day long; they've strained their eyes on subtleties. 207 isn't easy!

"Well...?" Jon tries again, "Does anybody know what a carburetor looks like?"

Silence. No one does. ☹️

## THE BIG DAY BIRD LIST

### MT. PALOMAR

Saw-whet Owl	Great Horned Owl
Spotted Owl	Screech Owl
Pygmy Owl	

### LAKE HENSHAW

Barn Owl	Poor-will
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### BRAWLEY

Lesser Nighthawk	Burrowing Owl
Mourning Dove	

### FINNEY LAKE

Yellow-headed Blackbird	Gambel's Quail
Abert's Towhee	Song Sparrow
Common Gallinule	Pied-billed Grebe
Cattle Egret	Bl.-crowned Night Heron
Rough-winged Swallow	Black-necked Stilt
Black-headed Grosbeak	Orange-crowned Warbler
MacGillivray's Warbler	Ground Dove
Verdin	Wilson's Warbler
American Coot	Starling
Ring-billed Gull	Warbling Vireo
Long-billed Marsh Wren	Ash-throated Flycatcher
Cactus Wren	Yellowthroat
Whimbrel	Roadrunner
Water Pipit	Phainopepla
Cinnamon Teal	Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper	Ruddy Duck
Northern Oriole	Black Tern
Rufous Hummingbird	Sora
White-crowned Sparrow	Chipping Sparrow
Lesser Goldfinch	Dusky/Hammond's Flycatcher
Western Flycatcher	Red-winged Blackbird
Yellow Warbler	Nashville Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Vaux's Swift	Western Tanager
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	

### RAMER LAKE

Mockingbird	House Sparrow
Eared Grebe	House Finch

### BRAWLEY AREA

Killdeer	Great-tailed Grackle
Green-winged Teal	White-faced Ibis
Long-billed Dowitcher	Barn Swallow
Rock Dove	Black Phoebe
Kestrel	Brown-headed Cowbird
Western Kingbird	Cliff Swallow
White-winged Dove	Gila Woodpecker
Lazuli Bunting	Pine Siskin
Cedar Waxwing	Black-chinned Hummingbird
Western Meadowlark	Lark Sparrow
Black-bellied Plover	Long-billed Curlew
Western Wood Pewee	Hooded Oriole
Solitary Vireo	American Robin
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Gray Flycatcher
American Goldfinch	Tree Swallow
American Widgeon	

### RED HILL, WISTER, & SO. END OF SALTON SEA

American Avocet	Dunlin
Northern Shoveler	Redhead
California Gull	Pintail
Spotted Sandpiper	Willet
Caspian Tern	Semipalmated Plover
Marbled Godwit	Loggerhead Shrike
White Pelican	Gull-billed Tern
Bank Swallow	Canvasback
Herring Gull	Bufflehead
Lesser Scaup	Snowy Egret
Horned Lark	Bonaparte's Gull
Wilson's Phalarope	Brewer's Sparrow
Forster's Tern	Lesser Yellowlegs
Greater Yellowlegs	Black Brant

continued on pg. 4

## CONSERVATION

As chairman of the Conservation Committee, I'd like to extend an invitation to all members to become actively involved in the Society's efforts to work for an improved environment for both people and wildlife. While public interest and concern for the environment have probably never been greater than now, your hands, feet, brain, and heart are needed to add volume and pitch to the voice which speaks out for a more livable world for plants, animals, and people. The demands of an increasing population and tremendous economic pressures are causing an assault upon our remaining natural areas—areas which threaten to be engulfed by the ground swell of development.

Numerous local examples of these forces at work can be cited, and the future of much of what remains of nature in Southern California remains in doubt. Will what is still left of the Santa Monica Mountains be incorporated into a National Park, or will the area be developed to add to the congestion and pollution of the rest of the Los Angeles Basin? What will become of the Channel Islands—a park to preserve unique forms of life, or a site for subdivisions and oil drilling? Will the State Legislature pass legislation to continue the protection of the California coast, or will the safeguards voted by the people in 1972 when they approved Proposition 20 be allowed to lapse the end of this year? These questions and more affect us all, for they have a direct bearing on the quality of our lives. But you can help to make sure the decisions made are the right ones.

The Conservation Committee can use many talents. We need people—to attend meetings of regulatory and legislative bodies, to present viewpoints, and to keep the membership apprised of what's going on. We need people—to write letters to politicians calling their attention to important legislation. We need people—to gather facts and prepare necessary background reports. And we need people to alert us to conservation matters which need action.

Sometimes I feel like there is no hope—that those in power have no regard for anything which is not man-made, and that they see the future as nothing more than a succession of dams, housing tracts, power plants, and recreation areas. But then there are signs that our message is being heeded.

An example is a recent letter to the Society from the County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning explaining that the Department is developing a Countywide general plan. The Department is seeking information on "significant ecological areas" so that the County can "preserve unique and irreplaceable areas, locate important biological recreational areas, and preserve diversity" in a region "which has the potential to become completely urbanized." That the County recognizes the importance of such areas and is soliciting input from knowledgeable sources to help identify them is tremendously encouraging.

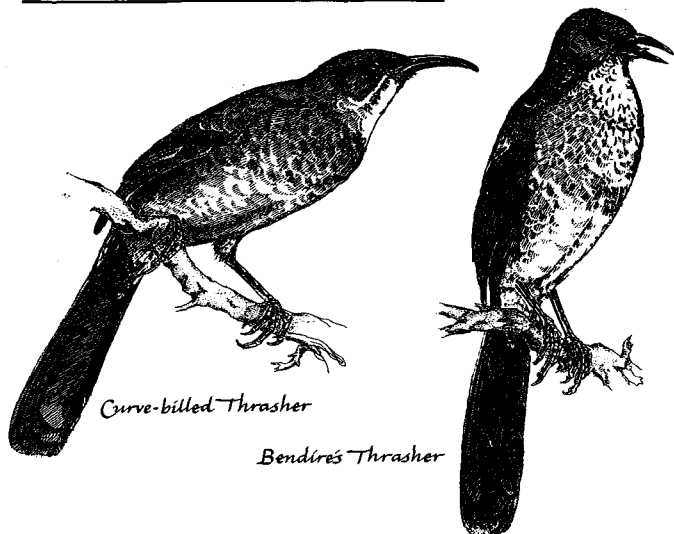
If you would like to help with this project—or join in other important work of the Conservation Committee—please call me at home (478-6269) or write me in care of Audubon House.

—Bill Turner



## Jon Dunn/FIELD NOTES

illustration by Mary Ellen Pereyra



Curve-billed Thrasher

Bendire's Thrasher

Two similar species that have caused some confusion among birders recently are the Curve-billed and the Bendire's Thrashers. Part of the problem is that the popular field guides emphasize the wrong characters (eye color, etc.).

By far the most widespread of the two birds is the **Bendire's Thrasher**. From mid-March through the summer, they can be found in the dense areas of Joshua trees near Cima. Further south around Joshua Tree National Monument and Yucca Valley they are much scarcer, but they still can be located with some regularity. And during the fall, a few usually make it to the coast (most records from S.D. County). Winter records are virtually nonexistent (less than five).

The **Curve-billed Thrasher** has been found almost every winter in the deserts of southeastern California. While it still is regarded as a rare visitor, the evidence indicates that wintering thrashers along the Colorado River or in the Imperial Valley are likely to be the Curve-billed.

By far the best mark on the Curve-billed is the very long *decurved* bill (similar to the bill of a California). The Bendire's bill is much *shorter and straighter*, the lower mandible lacking the curvature of the Curve-billed. Also, the base of the mandible on the Bendire's is pale rather than dark (as on the Curve-billed); but while this mark is diagnostic, it is very difficult to see. The Bendire's is a noticeably *smaller* bird with a more compact shape, while the Curve-billed is larger and longer, approaching the shape of a California or Crissal Thrasher. In addition, the coloration on the Bendire's is more of a *tannish-brown*, while the Curve-billed tends more to *grey*. Another distinctive feature is the pattern of the streaking—short, thin, *triangular spots* form a pattern of thin streaks on the breast of the Bendire's. The Curve-billed has much larger, more *blotchy spots*, and the spots do not form a particularly distinct pattern. Also, the Curve-billed seems to have a more distinct *whitish throat* than the Bendire's—with a bolder malar stripe (dark grey). Finally, the loud *shit-wheet* wolf-whistle call of the Curve-billed is diagnostic. The Bendire's, when not singing, is largely silent, occasionally uttering a blackbird-like *chuck* note (Van Remsen).

One word of warning. Thrashers molt in the late fall—so, although in fresh plumage (Nov.-Feb.) the coloration and the pattern of streaks is very distinct, by late spring both species can become worn to the point where they lose their distinctive patterns. Therefore, at this time of year, the bill is especially important as an identification tool. ♡

## Jean Brandt

# Introduced Birds in L. A.

To count or not to count, that is the question. One of the first species out-of-town birders ask to see in Los Angeles is the Ringed Turtle Dove, and now that the American Birding Association has "sanctified" the Yellow-headed Parrot, everyone is looking for it as well. So here goes: a list of introduced and established species in and around Los Angeles:

1. **Ringed Turtle Dove**. A few are found in the Los Angeles Civic Center, around Olvera Street, Pershing Square, and at MacArthur Park—near Wilshire and Alvarado.

2. **Spotted Dove**. This species has adapted very well, breeding throughout Southern California, from the Central Valley and Santa Barbara to San Diego and Palm Springs. A few are always in the gardens at Audubon House.

3. **Red-whiskered Bulbul**. A few are still found on the grounds of the Huntington Library in San Marino.

4. **Canary-winged Parrot**. A dozen or more roost at Point Fermin Park in San Pedro. They are best seen in the early morning or late afternoon.

5. **Yellow-headed Parrot**. Small flocks are reported in both Westwood and in Pasadena, but they move around a lot. Early morning is the best time to look and listen for them (they are very noisy). Try the Veteran's Hospital at Sawtelle and Wilshire in West L.A., or the L.A. County Arboretum in Arcadia.

6. **Lilac-crowned Parrot**. A few may still be found with the Yellow-headed Parrots at the Arboretum.

7. **Rose-ringed Parakeet**. Reported occasionally at the Arboretum.

8. **Red-crowned Parrot**. Reported occasionally at the Arboretum, and also with the flock of Yellow-headed Parrots in Westwood.

9. **Mealy Parrot**. Reported occasionally at the Arboretum.

10. **Cardinal**. Introduced at Whittier Narrows Nature Center in El Monte. The birds have since spread along the Rio Hondo and the San Gabriel riverbeds.

For further information, read *Feral Exotic Birds in Southern California*, by William Hardy, in the *Wilson Bulletin*, Vol. 85, No. 4, December, 1973. *Good birding!* ♡

## Big Day List *cont'd from pg. 3*

### UNIT 1 via WESTMORLAND

Clapper Rail	Mallard
Gadwall	Stilt Sandpiper
Virginia Rail	Turkey Vulture

### ANZA-BORREGO DESERT; YAQUI WELL

Prairie Falcon	Black-throated Sparrow
Rock Wren	Common Raven
Long-eared Owl	Costa's Hummingbird
Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	Red-tailed Hawk
Dark-eyed Junco	Scott's Oriole
California Quail	Brown Towhee
Golden Eagle	White-throated Swift

### En route to CUYAMACA

Scrub Jay	Common Bushtit
Mountain Quail	Black-chinned Hummingbird
Western Bluebird	Brewer's Blackbird

Steller's Jay	Osprey
Plain Titmouse	Acorn Woodpecker
Cooper's Hawk	Common Crow
Band-tailed Pigeon	Lewis' Woodpecker
California Thrasher	
<b>CUYAMACA STATE PARK</b>	
Rufous-sided Towhee	Purple Finch
Brown Creeper	Pygmy Nuthatch
Nuttall's Woodpecker	Mountain Chickadee
Common Flicker	Violet-green Swallow
Hermit Warbler	White-headed Woodpecker
White-breasted Nuthatch	Hairy Woodpecker
Bewick's Wren	House Wren
<b>Near LA MESA</b>	
Red-shouldered Hawk	
<b>MISSION GORGE</b>	
Wrentit	Bell's Vireo
Lawrence's Goldfinch	Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Anna's Hummingbird	Blue Grosbeak
Savannah Sparrow	Grasshopper Sparrow
<b>SAN DIEGO COAST</b>	
Western Grebe	Double-crested Cormorant
Least Tern	Common Tern
Western Gull	Elegant Tern
Sanderling	Horned Grebe
Black-legged Kittiwake	Ruddy Turnstone
Snowy Plover	Short-billed Dowitcher
Mew Gull	
<b>LA JOLLA COAST</b>	
Sooty Shearwater	Arctic Loon
Surf Scoter	Brandt's Cormorant
Red-breasted Merganser	Parasitic Jaeger
Brown Pelican	Red-throated Loon
Manx Shearwater	Royal Tern
Wandering Tattler	Black Turnstone

## Gail Gifford/FIELD TRIP REPORTS

**PELAGIC TRIP TO SANTA BARBARA ISLAND—April 25.** The party of 40 led by Ed Navojosky enjoyed an excellent day of birding, logging a total of 65 species for the day, exceptional for a pelagic trip. The island was teeming with land birds, including seven species of western warblers and five flycatchers. En route to the island, birds were everywhere on the water, including Arctic Loons, Pomarine Jaegers, and a lone Black Petrel. In addition, both Pacific White-sided and Dahl's Dolphins were sighted.

**MORONGO VALLEY—May 1.** It was clear, hot, and windless in the desert as 38 birders gathered to search the woodlands at the Morongo oasis for unusual migrants. Unfortunately, most of the winter visitors had departed, and there seemed to be a temporary lull in the surge of migrants. Lucy's Warblers and Summer Tanagers failed to appear—but leader Ed Navojosky nonetheless totalled up 80 species—including at least four Chats, a female Hepatic Tanager, a Virginia Rail, a White-winged Dove, and four species of vireos: Hutton's, Warbling, Bell's, and Solitary.

**LITTLE ROCK DAM—May 3.** Five birders under the leadership of Jean Brandt found a total of 60 species, including Western Bluebirds, Horned Larks, and a Prairie Falcon. Along the shore of the reservoir they discovered 6 species of western warblers, plus a Myrtle, in the *same tree*. In the afternoon, Scott's Orioles and Cactus Wrens were seen near Valyermo. The group was pleased to have with them a new birder from Australia.

**FERN DELL CYN, GRIFFITH PARK—May 8.** On an ideal May morning, George Ledec led 15 birders on a walk up the canyon, to log a total of 42 species, including 6 western warblers, a good selection of other migrants, and the usual complement of chaparral species.

**MORONGO VALLEY—May 8.** Eighteen participants, led by Jerry Maisel, turned up a total of 77 species, including 9 western warblers and 4 vireos (notably the Yellow-throated). Both Wied's and Ash-throated Flycatchers were present, as well as the usual Vermillion Flycatchers. All three orioles, Western and Summer Tanagers, and both Ladder-backed and Nuttall's Woodpeckers were on hand.

**OJAI LOOP TRIP—May 10.** Leaders Guy and Louise Commeau began their trip at Foster Park on a warm, sunny morning. The six participants found a total of 40 species, enjoying good looks at Purple Finches, and finding a nest of Phainopeplas. A Canyon Wren was nesting in a building at Matilija Hot Spring, and Steller's Jays appeared to be resident.

**PELAGIC TRIP TO SANTA BARBARA ISLAND—May 16.** A party of 48, led by Arnold Small, found thousands of Sooty and dozens of Pink-footed Shearwaters, plus hundreds of Red Phalaropes, many in breeding plumage. Among other birds seen at sea were Pomarine Jaegers, Sabine's Gulls, Xantus' Murrelets, Common Murres, and Fulmars. On the island Hank Brodtkin turned up a male Cape May Warbler, overlooked by many others who had preceded him in the canyon. An Indigo Bunting was also present.

**MOJAVE NARROWS REGIONAL PARK—May 17.** Ruth Lohr led 9 birders on a 2½ mile walk through the park, recording 40 species, including a Red-shouldered Hawk and many migrant warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and tanagers. Beaver were seen going into the lake in the early morning.

**PELAGIC TRIP TO SANTA BARBARA ISLAND—May 30.** On a clear, windy day, 46 participants under the leadership of Shumway Suffel logged a total of 43 species. The island produced only a Black-and-White Warbler and a Summer Tanager, but the sea trip turned up a Black-footed Albatross, a Fork-tailed Petrel, and a Skua, plus Ashy and Black Petrels, Sabine's Gulls, Xantus' Murrelets, a Rhinoceros Auklet, and a Parasitic Jaeger.

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## Shumway Suffel

## BIRDS of the Season



Early May saw a continuation of the rather dull spring migration, with no major concentrations of western migrants reported after late April.

However, scattered sightings of rare birds kept the telephone ringing as the month progressed. A call on May 5 from Doug Wilson, the ranger at Morongo Valley, told of a **Yellow-throated Vireo** (California's sixth), found by Douglas Morton that morning. It was later rediscovered, with difficulty, by many birders, including some of those on the LAAS field trip of May 8th. On their way to search for the vireo, Jon Dunn and Phil Unitt saw a very large white bird fighting the wind near the mouth of Big Morongo Canyon. A hurried study and a quick sketch on the back of an envelope convinced them (and the envious ones who did not see it) that it was a **Laysan Albatross!** This may be the first inland sighting in North America of any albatross, much less the rare Laysan. We can only speculate that this bird was flying north along the west coast of Mexico, became trapped in the Gulf; and, still heading north, flew overland to the Salton Sea; then overland again into San Geronio Pass.

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

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

**Yellow-billed Loons** have been recorded sparingly on the Pacific Coast south to Monterey Co.—and there are two records for Baja California (Western Birds, vol. 6, #1); but there were no reports from Southern California until May 5, when Abigail King and Joan Mills studied a big loon off the Malibu coast. Because of its large size, bill shape, and extensive white on the face, they determined that it was a Yellow-bill. It was seen by other birders during the week, who concurred in the identification. Even in our residential areas, two rare eastern warblers were reported—a singing male **Parula Warbler** (May 12) in Jan Tarble's Westwood neighborhood, and a male **Bay-breasted Warbler** at Ed Navojosky's bird bath near Olympic and Crenshaw on May 26. An unprecedented event was the early arrival at the Salton Sea of several hoped-for summer birds. Rich Stallcup's tour group studied a **Roseate Spoonbill** there on May 5; Arnold Small's party saw three **Black Skimmers**, a **Black Scoter** (the first inland record), and a **Red Phalarope** (but no Spoonbill) at the north end on May 9; Nancy Spear found two pairs of **Fulvous Tree Ducks** at Finney Lake and fifty **White-faced Ibis** at Unit 1, SSNWR, on May 10; and Bill Mack reported five **Gull-billed Terns**, eleven **Wood Storks**, and a **Laughing Gull** at the south end on May 15. Some of these species are not expected there until late June or July.

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

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

There were several out-of-range reports of single **White-winged Doves**: Morongo Valley (a little north of their Colorado Desert range) on May 15 and thereafter (Bill Mack, et al); Bouquet Canyon on May 8 (Laura Jenner Vance); Santa Barbara Island on May 9 (Dan Guthrie); and Oasis Ranch (a first for Mono Co.?) on May 31. Bill Mack also reports that four **Black Swifts** had returned to Santa Anita Canyon on May 14, and will probably nest there again. Encino Reservoir was a reliable place to find **Chimney Swifts** in late May and early June (Jon Dunn), but whether they nest locally is not known at this time. It is interesting to speculate that **Black Oystercatchers** might nest on the independent breakwater at Marina del Rey, as they've been seen rather consistently—with three there on May 19 (Jon Alderfer). A late **Evening Grosbeak** visited Bonnie Kennedy's feeder in Malibu Canyon on May 11. Most surprising to Don Sterba was hearing a **Whip-poor-will** calling persistently on the night of June 2 in the Ojai Valley (far west of previous reports, in the San Jacinto Mtns.).

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

**Redstarts**, **Waterthrushes**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, and **Indigo Buntings** were scattered sparingly at most well-birded spots. Van Remsen found a male **Bay-breasted Warbler** at Tollhouse Springs, east of Big Pine, on May 30; and at nearby Deep Springs College, sightings included a

**Yellow-throated Vireo** (the 2nd this May, and the 7th State record), a **Blackburnian Warbler** (both Harry Kreuger), as well as a **Parula**, a **Chestnut-sided**, and a **Magnolia Warbler**. At Oasis Ranch there was a **Philadelphia Vireo** (first mainland spring record); a **Magnolia**, a **Chestnut-sided**, a **Blackpoll**, a **Black-and-White**, and a **Black-throated Green Warbler**; an **Ovenbird**; and a **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** (new for Mono Co.). Scotty's Castle hosted a **Red-eyed Vireo**, another **Philadelphia Vireo**; a **Blackpoll**, two **Parulas**, and two **Tennessee Warblers**. Furnace Creek Ranch produced an adult **Little Blue Heron** (first inland record except for the Sea), two **Mississippi Kites** (less than 10 State records), a **Broad-winged Hawk**, an **Upland Sandpiper** (8th State record—Rich Stallcup and John Luther), a **Brown Thrasher**, and an **Eastern Kingbird** (only reports this year), a **Prairie Warbler** (first spring record—Arnold Small), a **Mourning Warbler** (third mainland record—Hank Brodtkin and the Clarkes), at least six **Bobolinks**, and another **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** (first for Inyo Co.). Further south, at China Ranch, near Tecopa, Jan Tarble found several pairs of **Lucy's Warblers** and a pair of **Summer Tanagers**, all presumably nesting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



### A Note of Thanks

to Ruth Lohr, Ruth and Les Wood, Olive Alvey, Dorothy Dimsdale, Ann Skipper, Marion Dedon, Terry Clark, Louise White, and all the others who have worked hard during these past twelve months to see that the Tanager is mailed on schedule.



## WESTERN Tanager

EDITOR Barry Clark

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# CALENDAR

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

**SUNDAY, AUG. 1—Mt. Pinos.** Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the intersection of Frazier Park Rd. and Cuddy Valley Rd. Go north on Interstate 5 to Frazier Park offramp; go west past the town of Frazier Park to Cuddy Valley Rd. in Lake-of-the-Woods. Some of the birds to be looked for are Brewer's Sparrows, Lark Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird, White-headed Woodpecker, and, at the top, the Condor. Leader: Bob Blackstone, 227-0521.

**SUNDAY, AUG. 8—Big Bear Lake Area and Arrastre Creek.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Boulder Bay Dam at the west end of the Lake. Take the San Bernardino Fwy. (Interstate 10) east and then go north to San Bernardino. Take Hwy. 18 to Big Bear Lake. Birds to be looked for are the Hepatic Tanager, Gray Vireo, Gray Flycatcher, and Virginia's Warbler. Leader: Kimball Garrett, 479-8667.

**SUNDAY, AUG. 15—Mt. Pinos.** A repeat of the Aug. 1st trip. Use the same directions and meet at 9:00 a.m. These two trips are especially interesting for out-of-state visitors, and this is one of the best times of the year to look for the Condors. Leader: Jean Brandt, 788-5188.

**WEDNESDAY, AUG. 18—Pelagic Trip to Anacapa Island and surrounding waters.** The *Paisano* will cruise the north shore of the island, round the tip to look for the American Oystercatcher, and then make a wide loop out to sea for pelagic birds. It will then go along Santa Cruz Island before returning to the Marina. The boat will depart from the National Parks Monument dock in the Ventura Marina at 7:00 a.m. and return about 6 p.m. Take Hwy. 101 north to

Ventura, exit at Victoria Ave., and follow the Channel Islands Nat'l. Mon. signs to the Marina. Price: \$18.00 per person. Make checks payable to L.A. Audubon and send a self-addressed, stamped envelope and your telephone number to Phil Sayre, #306, 660 So. Garfield, Monterey Park, Calif. 91754. You are requested to be at the dock ½ hr. before departure. No refunds or cancellations within 48 hrs. of departure. Leader: Ed Navojosky, 938-9766.

**THURSDAY, SEPT. 2—Executive Board Meeting, 9:00 p.m.,** Audubon House.

**SUNDAY, SEPT. 12—Pelagic Trip to Santa Barbara Island,** to look for pelagics and fall vagrants on the island. The *Paisano* will depart from the Channel Isl. Nat'l Mon. dock in the Ventura Marina at 5:30 a.m. and return about 7:30 p.m. Nite watch will be provided for those wishing to come up Saturday evening to sleep on board, on a first-come basis. Price is \$18.00 per person. See the Aug. 18 listing for instructions on reservations. You are requested to be at the dock ½ hr. before departure. No refunds or cancellations made within 48 hrs. of departure time.

**TUESDAY, SEPT. 14—Evening Meeting, 8:00 p.m.,** Plummer Park. Everyone welcome. Details in next Tanager.

**FRI., SAT., SUN., SEPT 17-19—Camping Trip to Bridal Veil Campground in Yosemite National Park.** Details in the next issue. Leader: Jean Brandt, 788-5188.



*Audubon Bird Report—call 874-1318*

## Golden Trout Workshop

This summer the Audubon chapters of Southern California are sponsoring four week-long workshops at Golden Trout Camp in the high Sierras just south of Mt. Whitney. The sub-alpine, semi-primitive camp is reached by a 2½ mile hike. The workshops, led by knowledgeable naturalists, are designed to enhance understanding of this fragile area. Easy-venture daily sessions will enable thorough examination of the ecology of the southeastern Sierra Nevada. A special highlight of this year's program is the addition of two **family weeks**. During these sessions special children's programs will be conducted concurrently with the adult workshops. Children participating must be accompanied by at least one parent. Special rates are available for families. Dates are: **I. July 25-31; II. August 1-7 (family week); III. August 8-14 (family week); IV. August 15-21.** Cost is \$80 per person per week, and \$50 per child age 4-12 during family week only. For full information write: Golden Trout Workshop, 825 No. Soledad, Santa Barbara, California 93103.

## FIELD STUDIES OF CALIFORNIA BIRDS

An introduction to the field observation and study of Southern California birds within their natural habitats. Four field trips will emphasize the biology and natural history of birds found at McGrath State Park, L. A. County Arboretum, Angeles National Forest, Irvine Park, Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary, and Lake Norconian. Lectures at UCLA will precede each field trip. The course is intended to familiarize beginners and amateur birders with valuable techniques and the equipment used to study birds in a variety of habitats. For registration and information, contact the Dept. of Biological and Physical Sciences, UCLA Extension, P.O. Box 24902, L. A., Calif. 90024, (213-825-3839). Evening lectures will be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in Room 6229, Math-Sciences Bldg., UCLA, on Sept. 29, October 20, November 3 and 17, and December 8. Saturday field trips will be on October 9 and 30, November 13, and December 4.

**Arnold Small, M. S.,** Professor of Biology at Los Angeles Harbor College, Wilmington. Fee \$75. 3 units of quarter system credit may be earned.

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