

San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society

# WESTERN MEADOWLARK

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## Legal Eagle *SBVAS and Allies Win Court Decision Protecting the San Jacinto Wildlife Area*

By Drew Feldmann

On May 23 of this year, a superior court judge in Riverside County stopped the massive housing development known as the Villages of Lakeview from proceeding.

This development called for 11,350 housing units to be built by the Lewis Companies on both sides of the Ramona Expressway south of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, with the development abutting the Wildlife Area's southern boundary. It would put a city of about 40,000 people into what is now mostly farmland, and this in turn would create significant problems in terms of traffic congestion, air pollution including greenhouse gasses, loss of habitat, and various edge effects that would threaten the wildlife area, to list just some of the deleterious consequences.

The San Jacinto Wildlife Area is designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society and is one of southern California's premier birding sites. It hosts some 300 species of birds and has been the location of some rare sightings, such as the recent visit by a gyrfalcon. It is probably the most precious birding spot in our chapter's area. SBVAS joined with the Center for Biological Diversity in litigation to stop the project by pointing out the numerous inadequacies of the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which Riverside County had approved, and using several other arguments. A similar suit was filed by the Sierra Club partnered with the Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley, and a third lawsuit was filed by the City of Riverside. The city was quite legitimately concerned about the impact that the estimated 25 thousand more vehicles on nearby roads and freeways would have on its citizens and infrastructure. The cases were consolidated by the court, so only one decision was issued.

Superior Court Judge Sharon Waters found that Riverside County had violated the California Environmental Quality Act, State Planning and Zoning Law, and its own general plan in approving the development, and therefore the development could not proceed. Judge Waters ruled that the EIR failed to adequately examine how the project would affect air quality and related health impacts, regional traffic, growth-inducing impacts, greenhouse gas emissions, and wildlife habitat. Procedurally, the judge found that the project description was inadequate and that the County should have re-circulated the EIR because of the quality and quantity of information that

was submitted by the public during the review process. Judge Waters did find that the project's noise impacts were adequately addressed and that the range of alternatives was adequate, so we won on nine points and lost on two.

This is likely just the first round of a long fight. The developer can re-write the EIR and start the process all over again, though this will take a while. Nor is this the only threat to the wildlife area. Looming on the other side is another development called the World Logistics Center, which would put 41 million square feet of warehouse space north of the gas plant. That's 941 acres just for the warehouses. There would also be roads, lights, set-backs, etc., not to mention thousands of trucks. We expect the DEIR for this to be out in a month or two.

While SBVAS has been involved in this fight for several years, we should particularly thank George Hague of the Sierra Club and Sue Nash and Tom Paulek of the Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley for their long, hard efforts to stop this development. Sue is a past president of SBVAS and Tom is a former director of the wildlife area.

## Bird of the Month: Western Wood-Pewee

By Steve Myers

The Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) is one of the common breeding birds of our local mountains. They are a neotropical migrant, spending the winter in South America, as far south as Bolivia. During the nesting season, they occur from east-central Alaska east to Manitoba, south to west Texas, and west to the Pacific coast. They also breed south throughout much of Mexico, into Central America.

Nesting habitat for Western Wood-Pewee is open woodland. They are common in both mixed coniferous forests and in oak and alder-dominated canyons of the foothills. This species breeds in all of southern California's mountain ranges, including those of the eastern Mojave Desert. They are also a common to abundant migrant through our area.

In my experience, nests of the Western Wood-Pewee are easier to find than most other songbirds. Nests are placed on horizontal branches of coniferous or deciduous trees, usually between 15 and 40 feet high, but sometimes even lower. The nest is an open cup made of grasses, plant fibers, and spider web. The outside is often decorated with mosses, leaves, and lichens. A clutch of eggs is generally from 2 to 4 eggs, which are incubated by the female. The chicks are attended by both parents.



As in the case with all tyrant flycatchers, almost their entire  
(continued, Bird of the Month, page 4)

## Our Too-Thirsty Forests

By Helen M. Poulos and James G. Workman

*Reprinted from the LA Times*

Ronald Reagan once justified logging with “a tree is a tree; how many more do you need to look at?” Besides, he warned, “trees cause more pollution than automobiles.” We cringed at his biases. Yet due to forces none foresaw, Reagan’s gaffes may now ring true.

Today, the hottest and thirstiest parts of the United States are best described as over-forested. Vigorous federal protection has stocked semiarid regions of public land with several billion trees too many. And day after day these excess trees deplete a natural resource that has become far more precious than toilet paper or 2-by-4’s: water.

Scientists and water managers report that 39 states face water scarcity. Much of the nation’s freshwater shortfall comes from our population growth, waste, hunger and contaminants. But we must also now implicate the escalating thirst of unnatural forests.

Water depletion from afforestation—the establishment of trees or tree stands where none previously were—is the unintended consequence of a wildly popular federal policy. For millenniums, fires set by lightning or Native Americans limited forest stocks to roughly a few dozen trees per acre. All that changed after the nationally terrifying Big Blowup wildfires of 1910, which led the United States to in effect declare war on wildfire. The government’s wartime-like tactics included security watchtowers, propaganda, aerial bombing and color-coded threat alerts. Uncle Sam trained elite Hotshot and smokejumper crews to snuff out enemy flames. Congress annually funded the war effort with an emergency blank check, now \$2.5 billion. Decades of heroic victories against fire led to gradual defeat in the larger war. Fuel builds up, and when it ignites, the fires burn hotter, faster and more destructively. More new trees complete for less sunlight, thinner soil nutrients and scarcer water resources. Native wildlife suffers. Insects and diseases spread faster. Public subsidies protect private properties at the wildland-urban interface.

Ironically, congress enacted the anti-fire 1911 Weeks Act and 1924 Clarke-McNary Act to prevent erosion and thus secure downstream navigable rivers. That logic made sense in damp Eastern states, but it had the opposite effect in the semiarid West. There, fire exclusion degraded the integrity and runoff of high-elevation watershed recharge zones.

Naturally, forest managers focus on forest health. Yet combing through their extensive upland research, our analysis also found the larger scope of downstream casualties: suppression of fire causes suppression of flows. Indeed, in some landscapes, you literally can’t see the river for the trees.

Call it the water-fire nexus. To be sure, the dynamics are complex. Impacts fluctuate locally depending on forest slope, aspect, age, altitude, density, latitude, species composition and natural history. But adjusting for these variables reveals the nexus’ overarching pattern.

First, the past century of fire suppression has resulted in roughly 112 to 172 more trees per acre in high-elevation forests

of the West. That’s a fivefold increase from the pre-settlement era.

Second, denser growth means that the thicker canopy of needles will intercept more rain and snow, returning to the sky as vapor 20% to 30% of the moisture that had formerly soaked into the forest floor and fed tributaries as liquid. But let’s conservatively ignore potential vapor losses. Instead, assume that the lowest average daily sap flow rate is 70 liters per tree for an open forest acre of 112 new young trees. Even then, this over-forested acre transpires an additional 2.3 acre-feet of water per year, enough to meet the needs of four families.

Third, that pattern adds up. Applying low-end estimates to the more than 7.5 million acres of Sierra Nevada conifer forests suggests the water-fire nexus causes excess daily net water loss of 58 billion liters. So each year, post-fire afforestation means 17 million acre-feet of water can no longer seep in or trickle down from the Sierra to thirsty families, firms, farms or endangered fisheries.

So how do we unlock the nexus to replenish the Earth? A century’s accumulation of dry fuel in public lands makes it too expensive and risky—for people, property, habitats or carbon emissions—to unleash prescribed fires throughout our 16-million-acre ponderosa tinderbox. Mechanical thinning generates popular distrust as long as timber industry chain saws try to cut “high grade” valuable mature growth to compensate for less profitable small-diameter “trash trees.”

Happily, a lumber mill’s trash has now become a water user’s treasure. Thirsty downstream interests could organize to restrict thinning to scrawny excess trees simply for the purpose of releasing the liquid assets they consume. Western water rights markets value an acre-foot at \$450 to \$650 and rising. So rather than compete with forests for rain and snow, private and public institutions could invest \$1,000 per acre (average U.S. Forest Service price) to cut down fire-prone trash trees, yielding at least \$1,100 to \$1,500 worth of vital water. To reduce fuel loads and increase runoff, the water-fire nexus pays for itself.

This pragmatic approach has regional precedents. The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities cites forest-to-faucet agreements emerging from Denver to Raleigh, N.C. The only obstacle is our century-old cultural mind-set that if a dozen trees are good, 100 trees are better. But as temperatures rise, too much forest strangles too many watersheds. To replenish streams before they dry up, we lifelong tree-huggers must learn when and where to let go.

Helen M. Poulos is a fire ecologist and postdoctoral teaching fellow at Wesleyan University’s College of the Environment. James G. Workman, a former wildland forest firefighter, is a visiting professor at Wesleyan and the author of “Heart of Dryness.”

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*The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea, and sky and their amazing life.*

—Rachel Carson

2012 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Silent Spring*

## West Nile Virus Season Begins

West Nile virus is a mosquito-borne disease that was originally found in Africa. In 1990, it was detected in the eastern United States; since then the virus has spread throughout the United States and is well established in most states, including California.

Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes are WNV carriers (“vectors”) that become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite. West Nile Virus is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus, or by breathing in the virus.

People typically develop symptoms from 3 to 14 days after they are bitten by an infected mosquito. Less than one percent (about 1 in 150) people of individuals infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent. WN virus infection can be fatal. Up to 20 percent (about 1 in 5) of the people who become infected will display symptoms which can include fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back. Symptoms generally last for just a few days, although even previously healthy people have been sick for several weeks. Approximately 80 percent of people (about 4 of 5 who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms.

An infected mosquito can bite any animal, but not all animals will become sick. The disease most often affects birds but may occasionally cause disease in other animals. Wild birds serve as the main source of virus for mosquitoes. Infection has been reported in more than 225 bird species. Although many birds that are infected with WNV will not appear ill, WNV infection can cause serious illness and death in some birds. The most severe illnesses are seen among the corvid birds, which include crows, jays, ravens, and magpies.

Tree squirrels with West Nile virus can develop neurological symptoms such as uncoordinated movement, paralysis, shaking, or circling and may die.

Like people, most horses bitten by mosquitoes will not become sick with WNV. However, of those that do, clinical signs may include stumbling, circling, hind leg weakness, inability to stand, muscle tremors, and death. For more information about West Nile Virus and horses, please visit the California Department of Food and Agriculture website at <http://www.cdffa.ca.gov>.

This year, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and local vector control agencies will emphasize collecting and testing many susceptible species, but monitoring dead birds is extremely important. Even birds not tested for WNV are helpful for local vector control agencies in targeting their mosquito control efforts. The public can report dead birds by calling the toll-free WNV hotline, 1-877-WNV-BIRD (968-2473), or by submitting a report online at [www.westnile.ca.gov](http://www.westnile.ca.gov). The website also features a short video on how to handle and submit a dead bird for testing.

## Why Do Birds Have Their Patterns?

By Jim Stevenson

*Reprinted from Gulls N Herons. Spring 2012*

While patterns and color schemes may seem random to the casual observer, there are actually specific purposes scientists identify for most of the “ways” birds (and other animals) look. Here are some of the regular ones:

The **Black Skimmer** is dark above and light below:

**Countershading:** Birds (and many animals) are generally darker on top and lighter underneath, for a variety of reasons. First, an enemy from above will have a harder time spotting an animal on the ground if it's dark on top. More over, if a bird is light underneath, and is sitting in a tree, its light underside blends with the light sky, also helping him hide. But it needs to be said that pigment in general expends energy to

maintain, so if an animal is normally on the ground, like a snake, energy itself demands that the creature not waste energy on colors when “nobody” sees it!

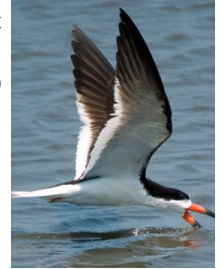
**Willetts**, with most sandpipers, have white wing-stripes:

**Flash Colors:** Many birds have bright colors in their wings and tail for a variety of reasons, but the most important one appears to be drawing predators to the expendable parts of their body. If a falcon or Bobcat heads for a bird, and sees bright colors in wing and/or tail feathers, it is likely to come away with feathers and not the bird itself.

Some birds like mockingbirds also use flash colors to scare up creatures from the ground, and many woodpeckers use the red on their head to startle bugs hiding in the bark crevices. It is also suggested that some birds like peacocks use flash colors in their tail to startle potential predators upon take-off.

**Killdeer** have rings that break up their shape:

**Ruptive Marks:** These are colors and patterns that break up the form of the bird and make it not appear to be a living thing. Examples might be the solid color of male ducks' heads, the white head and tail of our National Emblem or the harlequin appearance of a Ruddy Turnstone.



**Common Loon winter:** **Seasonal change:** many birds look quite different in the warm season than they do in the colder months. The “breeding” plumage, often called “alternate” plumage, is for courtship, so it's generally seen in spring and summer. Fall and winter sees these species in their “winter” plumage, often called “basic” plumage by scientists.

The idea of these two plumages is to provide a low-energy, camouflaged coat for the time when birds are not engaged in

breeding activities, and well-marked attractive plumages for courtship. In addition, sometimes both plumages are better camouflage, such as with ptarmigan, which are white in the snowy winters of the far North, and brown in the summer.

**Snow Geese** have a light and dark morph:

**Polymorphism:** A few birds have more than one plumage that members of their species may occur in. This may be age-related, like the juvenile colors above, but often these are adult plumages its entire life. A great example here on Galveston is our Official Island Bird, the Reddish Egret, which has a dark morph and a white one as well.



**Feed Your Yard Birds and Help SBVAS**

Wild birdseed will be sold at all general meetings of SBVAS as a regular fundraiser for the organization. The seed is a good blend for the area and will be available in 25 pound bags for \$20.

To get your seed and help SBVAS maintain a regular monthly fundraiser, please pay at the sales table and get a receipt. Then see Kirk Stitt in the parking lot to load your seed.

You can also preorder seed by phoning Kirk at (909) 886-5513. Leave a message about the type of seed you want (thistle, black-oil sunflower, or general purpose mix) and your seed will be ready for pickup at the next general meeting



(Bird of the Month, cont.)

diet is comprised of insects. Occasionally a few berries are eaten.

Their habit of calling frequently makes identification of Western Wood-Pewees straight-forward on the breeding grounds. The typical call is a harsh, slightly descending *peeeer*, and the song has a three-note *tswee-tee-teet* often interspersed with *peeeer* notes.

Silent birds in migration are most often confused with Willow Flycatchers, as both species essentially lack eye rings and can be similar in plumage. The pewee has a noticeably longer primary extension, with the tips of the wings extending about one-third to one-half way down the tail, while the Willow Flycatcher's wings extend barely past the base of the tail.



The lower mandibles of Willow Flycatchers are all orangish, while those of wood-pewees have dark tips. The "vested" underparts of Western Wood-Pewees is a highly variable field mark, and should not be used alone when trying to distinguish them from Willow Flycatchers. Willow Flycatchers, like other *Empidonax* flycatchers, also tend to flick their tails while perched, a habit not seen in the wood-pewees. The Eastern Wood-Pewee, which is an accidental migrant in California, is very similar in appearance to the Western Wood-Pewee, and the two are best separated in the field by vocal differences. Western Wood-Pewees are one of those species whose breeding habits are often easy to observe. Since their nests are sometimes relatively conspicuous, it can be a lot of fun to sit back and watch them feeding young. Our field trips to the Greenhorn Mountains and San Bernardino Mountains usually allow these sorts of observations of pewees.

**Photos:** far left—Western Wood-Pewee feeding chicks, Greenhorn Mts., July 2007; above left—Western Wood-Pewee in migration, near California City, October 2004. Both images © Stephen J. Myers.



**Local Sightings**

By Brad Singer

Although starting slowly, the spring migration gained momentum, with many vagrants starting to appear mid to late May. Both Riverside and San Bernardino County's sightings have been helped by a cadre of surveyors working along the Colorado River from Blythe to Needles. Again, **Riverside County** has had some notable finds. After going undetected in the county for many years, Clapper Rails were heard at the north end of the Salton Sea and in Blythe. Elegant Terns were found in the Prado basin along with a Little Blue Heron, Western Gull and Black Swift. Just south of Blythe in McIntyre Park, a pair of Gilded Flickers were found possibly nesting. The Blythe sewer ponds were home to a Semipalmated Sandpiper. Just west of Blythe in the Palen-McCoy wilderness, a Pyrrhuloxia and Curve-billed Thrasher, both CBRC review species, were spotted. Mr. Riverside County, Chet McGaugh, was active as usual and found Gull-billed Tern, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Surf Scoter, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Western Gull at the north end of the Salton Sea. A very rare find inland, a pair of Gull-billed Terns were seen at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area. Also observed were a pair of Purple Martins. Northern Waterthrush, Bronzed Cowbird, and a captive-born Trumpeter Swan were observed in and near the Colorado River. Finally, Indigo Buntings were seen across the county along with Grasshopper Sparrows.

**San Bernardino County** seemed to have a different set of vagrants. Most common were Northern Parula, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and American Redstart, with sightings in the eastern Mojave Desert, San Bernardino Mountains, Morongo, and Glen Helen Park. Painted Redstart and Ovenbird were also found in the eastern Mojave, along with Eastern Phoebe and Orchard Oriole. Becoming quite rare in San Bernardino County, a Brant was found just outside of Barstow. Migrating Clay-colored, White-throated, and Swamp Sparrow were observed in the eastern Mojave. A Virginia's Warbler was seen in Zzyxx. The San Bernardino Mountains were host to a White-winged Dove, Scarlet Tanager, and returning Whippoorwill and Black Swift. Short-billed Dowitchers were located at Daggett, a Northern Waterthrush at 29 Palms, and a Lucy's Warbler in Morongo. Purple Martins returned to Lost Lake and a migrating female was spotted in the eastern Mojave. Finally, Grasshopper Sparrows continued at Prado Regional Park and a Spotted Dove was relocated in Fontana.

**Photo Quiz**

By Brad Singer



Photo taken in Mojave Desert in May

Welcome to the third in the series of photo quizzes, a column used to better your identification skills, and ultimately, a way in which to become more accustomed to perusing our wonderful online newsletter at <http://www.sbvass.org/meadowlark.htm>. If you would like to participate in our quiz, email your answers to [sbvass-bird.id@gmail.com](mailto:sbvass-bird.id@gmail.com). Please include your name, home city, and

the common name of the bird as it appears in the ABA checklist. To further encourage participation, just **answer** (correct or incorrect) the next five quizzes, and you will receive a free copy of the new (sixth edition) National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America. **May/June quiz answer:** If you thought gulls were confusing, sparrows can give one headaches. Not only are they somewhat plain in appearance, but their field marks are ever so slightly different as to make field identification quite difficult. Additionally, they are rarely out in the open always diving into bush or grass just as you raise your binoculars. It can be quite satisfying just identifying even the most common of sparrows. That said, our first sparrow on the left should be familiar to most birders. Its chestnut crown, black eyeline extending through the lores, while supercilium (eyebrow), unstreaked gray chest blending into a white belly, and short, notched tail are all diagnostic of the common Chipping sparrow. The sparrow on the right, although superficially similar to the Chipping Sparrow, has some definitive differences. Its tail is longer and more rounded, without notch. It has both a distinctive malar and moustachial stripe, and has rufous in the lesser wing coverts. Its crown is rufous streaked with gray, with a pale median crown stripe. I took a picture of both the Chipping sparrow and Rufous-winged Sparrow in Arivaca Cienega, a small wildlife preserve about twenty miles northwest of Nogales. The rufous-winged Sparrow is very localized in parts of southeast Arizona. Unlike most sparrows that breed in the spring, they breed in the summer when monsoon rains bring moisture to the area. Known to be sedentary, they are affected by loss of habitat more so than many other sparrows. Their song can be variable, but always includes introductory notes followed by a trill. The males sing year round, but especially during nesting season and can be a delight to hear.

**Bearpaw Ranch**

is a 70 acre nature sanctuary, operated by the San Bernardino Audubon Society and may be visited 7 days a week from dawn 'til dusk by members of Audubon and their guests. Bearpaw Ranch is nestled on the north slope of scenic Mill Creek Canyon at 4,500 feet elevation, surrounded by the towering peaks of the San Bernardino National Forest. To reach Bearpaw Ranch, take Highway 38 to the Forest Falls turnoff. Go only a few car lengths on Valley of the Falls Dr. and look for our small wooden sign on the right. We have a new paved road, the entry is easy for almost all normal passenger cars. There is an electronically operated entry gate. Members who wish to visit the Sanctuary should call any board member in advance to get the gate code. It is not a requirement that the caretaker is at home for you to visit. If the gate does not open because of mechanical failure, you are welcome to walk in or stop for birding along the creek bed.

Bearpaw Sanctuary, 38801 Valley of the Falls Drive P.O. Box 88; Forest Falls, CA 923396  
 Bearpaw Sanctuary is now on Facebook.

If you type "Bearpaw Sanctuary" into the SEARCH function, you'll find us. Bearpaw visitors are encouraged to report interesting wildlife sightings and share their favorite nature photos from their Bearpaw visits.



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**CALENDAR**

**Board Meetings:** August 1, 2012

**General Meetings:** on summer hiatus, start again in September

All meetings are in the San Bernardino County Museum, 2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands. Board meetings are the first Wednesday of the month, and General Membership meetings are on the third Wednesday of the month. To reach the museum, take the California St. exit off I-10, go north one block to Orange Tree Lane and turn right. The museum will be on your left. Meetings, except potlucks, start at 7:30 and doors open at 7. Potlucks begin at 6:30.



A Western wood-Pewee attends a nest hanging directly over the trail near Blue Ridge Campground. The nest was spotted by the participants in Gene's San Gabriel Mountains field trip on June 9.

## In the Bird World, not all Fliers are Created Equal

By Jim Stevenson, reprinted from *Gulls N Herons*

Almost all birds fly, which is a huge advantage. They can find mates, migrate, forage easier, escape enemies, flee intense heat and many more smaller reasons for flight. But there is a huge difference between the flying abilities of our 9000 species of birds, and some pretty freaky flight styles. Let's look at some of them.



Greater Sage Grouse

First, some birds like the relatives of chickens are strictly short-distance fliers. They have light meat in their flight muscles and while they have tremendous bursts of speed to escape predators, they can only maintain their flight for a few hundred yards. Thus, birds like quail, pheasant and grouse are non-migratory. These birds don't have a lot of stamina in their

muscles, a result of lesser amounts of myoglobin.

Some birds are excellent fliers but spend an inordinate amount of time flying in one place. Everyone knows about hummingbirds, but they aren't the only birds that hover. Kestrels and White-tailed Kites are raptors that hover over fields looking for rats and mice, plus whatever else they choose for food. Terns hover a lot, too.



White-tailed Kite hovering

Some birds accomplish the same thing as hovering when they essentially sit motionless in the air, due to updrafts from thermals, cliffs and other tall structures such as buildings.



Magnificent Frigatebird

Frigatebirds are masters at this, along with pelicans and gulls, often seen hanging in the air above Galveston's Seawall

Many birds escape airborne predators with flash colors in their wings and/or tail, attracting hunters to these expendable portions of the body. They may lose a few feathers but their lives are spared. These bright patches are called flash colors, and are found on many songbirds, ducks and shorebirds, to name a few.

For balance, some birds fly with their necks extended and others with the head pulled in. Loons, grebes, cormorants and Anhingas are examples of birds which extend their necks while in flight, as opposed to herons and egrets that pull their head in. It seems heavier birds tend to extend their necks for balance while lighter families are more compact.



Great Blue Heron flying with neck tucked



Sandhill Crane flying with neck extended

Some birds have odd flight patterns. Several, like the courting male Lark Bunting, fly like butterflies, either while courting or just as their way of flight. It is not known why they (or butterflies) use this style but it's a good field mark for identification.

Some species glide for long distances, and have wings that are specially adapted for creating lift as they glide. Perhaps the bird we see performing this act more than any other is the Brown Pelican, and they have even learned over the eons to use the energy created by waves displacing air to buoy them above the water's surface.

There is also an incredible variation in speed among the various groups of birds. Rails are insufferably slow fliers, de-



Brown Pelicans

spite one actually flying across the Gulf of Mexico in spring. Among songbirds there is some variation, with flycatchers, swallows and thrushes being among the faster echelon of fliers. But the three groups which likely get the prize for avian speed are falcons, jaegers and swifts, all with long pointed wings and powerful strokes.



Peregrine Falcon

**Saturday-Sunday, July 14-15, 2012**  
**Greenhorn Mountains & the Southern Sierra**  
**Steve Myers** (951) 634-9767

We will meet at 7:00a.m. (for breakfast), or 7:45 a.m. (if you don't want breakfast) at Cheryl's Diner in Kernville (11030 Kernville Rd., Kernville, Ca. 93238-9765). From Kernville we will head up into the Greenhorn Mountains. The Greenhorns are at the southern end of the Sierra Nevada, and offer extensive coniferous forests, wet meadows, and spectacular views. We expect to see many of the typical high mountain coniferous forests, wet meadows, and spectacular views. We expect to see many of the typical high mountain birds, and the Greenhorns are the southern range limit of birds such as the Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Goshawk, and Pacific Wren. On Saturday night we will be camping at the Long Meadow group campground (toilets, but no water), just north of the Trail of 100 Giants (Sequoias!) We will visit nearby Holey Meadow, which is a great place for Flammulated Owl. Among the other localities visited on this trip will be the Trail of 100 Giants, Portuguese Pass, Tiger Flat, Sherman Pass, and possibly Kennedy Meadows. Be sure to have adequate food and water to last from Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon. We usually plan to stop at a restaurant for an early dinner before heading back to the Inland Empire on Sunday. This trip can be terrific for montane birds, butterflies, small mammals, and herps, and the scenery is unsurpassed!

### Birding Tip

Have you ever been asked to identify a bird by a non-birder? If you ask him what it looked like, he may reply, "it was gray and red with a large beak and walking on the road." And if you are really lucky, he may say it is smaller than a hawk but larger than a sparrow. Ask the same question to a beginning birder and they may say, "its back was dark grayish-brown, the breast reddish-brown and the bill somewhat large. Its head was black. The bird was foraging on the ground. An intermediate birder may describe the bird in this way, "Given its posture and the fact that it was feeding on the ground, it was most likely a large thrush, with a blackish crown, white around its eyes, reddish breast, grayish-brown uppers and yellow bill." Finally, ask an advanced birder what it looked like and they will most likely reply, "the birds overall appearance and location suggests a large thrush; with blackish crown, white crescents above and below the eye, white throat streaked with black, scapulars dark gray, rich-rufous underparts, yellow bill, and white undertail coverts. There were white tips on the outer retrices and the feather edges were pale suggesting fresh plumage.

What's the bird? It's fairly obvious that it's an American Robin. However, the point of the preceding paragraph is that **the more fundamental knowledge one has of bird anatomy, the easier it is to assess and ultimately identify the bird.** I used the Robin in the example above, not because it is difficult to identify, but just the opposite. Being easy to recognize, we tend to disregard its characteristic field marks. However, slightly change the color of its upperparts and eliminate the white around its eyes, and you may discover you are looking at a Rufous-backed Robin, a bird native to Mexico and rarely seen in the U.S. On the other end of the spectrum, if one wants to discern the differences in a small passerine group such as *spizella* sparrows, anatomical knowledge is a must. You will hear such words as auricular, malar stripe, lateral throat stripe, supercillium, lore, nape, and median crown stripe. Recognizing every one of those areas can separate a Clay-colored Sparrow from a Brewer's Sparrow.

Where's the best place to learn anatomy? Every field guide has a section in the front of the book dealing with bird anatomy. Some are better than others. The best I have found is Kenn Kaufmann's latest edition of his "Field Guide to Advanced Birding." He invests over 25 pages of excellent diagrams, photos, and descriptions discussing

*(Birding Tip continued in next column)*

## Calendar for Field Trips 2011 to 2012



**July 14-15:** Greenhorn Mountains—Steve Myers

**August 18:** Insane Jaunt—Tom Benson

### Field Trip Checklist

Comfortable shoes or hiking boots, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent.  
 A good Road Map,  
 Full fuel tank, drinking water, snacks and lunch, binoculars and or a scope, field guide  
 Come and Enjoy. Call Field Trip Leader for last minute cancellations, questions or changes... ☘

**Saturday, August 18, 2012 - 6:00 am**

### Insane Jaunt to the Salton Sea

**Tom Benson** (909) 648-0899

How would you like to see birds like Wood Stork, Stilt Sandpiper, Laughing and Yellow-footed Gulls, Gull-billed and Black Terns, Burrowing Owl, Gila Woodpecker, and Bronzed Cowbird? All those and more may be yours at the mere price of 110 degree average daily highs in the pungent glory and spectacle of the Salton Sea in summertime. With luck, perhaps something like an Anhinga, Tricolored Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, or Magnificent Frigatebird will appear (or is it just the heat?)

#### DO NOT COME ON THE TRIP WITHOUT:

**LOTS OF WATER, a large ice chest, lots of ice, and snacks, a hat and sunscreen, a working air conditioner, and a full tank of gas (top off in Indio).**

Meeting place will be at the Salton Sea NWR Headquarters. Going south on Hwy 111 along the east shore of the Salton Sea, turn right at Sinclair Road which is signed for the Sonny Bono Salton Sea Nat'l Wildlife Refuge and Red Hill. Salton Sea NWR Headquarters is at the end of Sinclair Road 5.5 miles from Hwy 111. If you reach the town of Calipatria on Hwy 111 you have gone 3 miles too far. We'll meet at 6:00a.m., just before sunrise to beat the heat as much as we can, and we'll bird until we've had enough. We will stop for lunch in Brawley at some place with air conditioning. Our route will be determined by the birds of interest are being seen. Motels are available in Calipatria and Brawley for those wishing to spend Friday night in the area

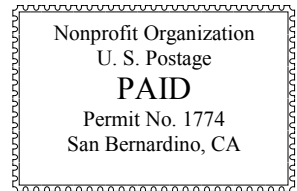
*(Birding Tip, cont.)*

passerines, shorebirds, and gulls. Written in laymen's terms, it is easy to follow and digest. A hands-on approach is another outstanding method of learning anatomy. If you have a pet bird, study it and try to identify all its body parts. If you have access to a museum that houses specimens and are available to study, take advantage of it. And if you really want a hands-on approach, take a bird banding class. Locally, Audubon director Steve Myers teaches an extension course through the University of California at Riverside on bird banding. Sign up! One final thought. Next time you are out birding, spend a few minutes studying a common bird. Hopefully it will sit for you long enough to observe all its field marks. Write a thorough description of what you saw (in anatomical language) and give it to a birding buddy. If they can identify the bird, you are well on your way!

*I realized that if I had to choose, I would rather have birds than airplanes.*

*Charles Lindbergh, shortly before his death, 1974*

**THE WESTERN MEADOWLARK**  
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Everyone is always welcome!

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SBVAS Membership currently at 2,393

To reach the Museum, take the California Street exit off the 10 Freeway and go north 1 block to Orange Tree Lane—turn right. The museum will be on your left...



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San Bernardino Valley Audubon

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ SBVAS Membership @ \$24 a/year (includes subscription to *The Western Meadowlark*)

\_\_\_\_ I wish to receive the *Western Meadowlark* **only** electronically \_\_\_\_\_

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Please enclose a check payable to SBVAS



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\_\_\_\_ NAS New Member/ Gift Membership \$20 (renewal will be \$35, includes 1 year of *Audubon* magazine, 1 year Chapter membership, 1 year subscription to *Western Meadowlark* if in SBVAS area)

\_\_\_\_ NAS Regular/Renewal Membership \$35 (includes 1 year of *Audubon* magazine)

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