

El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



June 1992

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WRENTIT

Voice of the Chaparral

EVEN those who ordinarily have no ear for bird songs often comment on a loud, ringing voice from the chaparral-covered hillsides in the foothills that repeats the same staccato note, finally running the series rapidly together. This is the wrentit, heard a hundred times before it is seen." (Ralph Hoffman's field guide, *Birds of the Pacific States*, written in 1927, has delightful descriptions of many California birds and is especially good on bird calls.)

The wrentit and its echoing song have come to symbolize the chaparral. No hillside is too overgrown with the brushiest of scrub for the wrentit. The hot, close, impenetrable thickets of mature chaparral, draped with clematis and buttressed by poison oak, are the home of the little wrentit.



Pause long enough in your stroll through the chaparral and you will discover the wrentit. A quivering shrub, a disappearing brown tail and a perky bird staying hidden in the shrubbery are telltale signs.

In every season and in almost every corner of the chaparral, the wrentit lives out its sedentary life, its only companion being a mate, which it chooses for life. The males and females are constantly together, flitting quickly and quietly from one twig to another in the densest bushes, never perching up to sing like other birds. Together they travel the unknown passages of a secret landscape, one that looks thoroughly uninviting to humans, but one for which the wrentits are perfectly fitted.

Male and female wrentits look alike: small, round-bodied birds with a long tail held cocked at an angle. The wrentit's upperparts are grayish-brown and its breast, faintly streaked, is washed with cinnamon. The bird's distinctive white eye is visible at close range.

The wrentit doesn't venture more than a few miles from the place of its birth, and it spends most of its life on a home territory of about two acres. Loath to fly in the open, when it finally does, the wrentit pumps its tail and flutters its short wings, as though even crossing distances of 10 or 20 feet is too much of an effort.

The wrentit's nest is usually placed in a bush, sometimes quite near a

pathway. The nest is built by both birds, and resembles a deep cup; four pale green eggs are laid within it.

After the breeding season, the adult birds remain together. They make a soft *tik-tik-tik* noise to communicate with each other when traveling through the chaparral. Wrentit pairs also reportedly preen each other, and "roost together, leaning against each other with feathers interlaced and inner legs drawn up, appearing as one ball of feathers," to quote Terres in *The Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds*.

Once heard, the *pit-pit-pit-tr-r-rrrrr* song of the male wrentit, reverberating from the hillsides and carrying far up the canyon, is not soon forgotten. Though the bird gives fragments of the song throughout the year, the spring version issuing across the sweet-smelling ceanothus slopes haunts your memory.

You may grow accustomed to the wrentit's song, but it never loses its wild, solitary feeling. Hiking down the
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Activities

Thursday, June 4

"Friends of the Andree Clark Bird Refuge." A meeting will be held by the City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Dept. at the Ortega House, corner of East Ortega and Salsipuedes Streets, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. The purpose is to form a group of interested, qualified citizens and staff to act as an advisory council on future enhancements to the site, and to help organize a docent program. If you are interested, please call Linda Angulo, Parks Div. (564-5462).

Saturday, June 6

Tentative field trip to Nojoqui Falls for the purple martin. Call the office for information (964-1468).

Saturday, June 6

A fund-raising barbeque benefit in Ojai for the Raptor Rehabilitation and Release Program. This event, sponsored by the Conservation Endowment Fund of Ojai, will feature a wild animal show by the Moorpark College Exotic Animal Program, an African arts and crafts sale, live music, entertainment and BBQ. Admission (tax deductible): \$25 per adult (\$45 per couple), \$6 per child (under 5 free). From 3:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Santa Ana Canyon Nature Preserve, 2160 Baldwin Rd (Hwy 150), 2 miles west of intersection Hwy 33 and Hwy 150 (towards Lake Casitas). Call (805) 649-3587 for reservations.

Sunday, June 7

Annual SBAS picnic, and election of Board Members, at Giorgio Park from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday, June 13

Mission Creek cleanup organized by SBAS, Sierra Club and Urban Creeks Council, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. Meet at corner of Castillo & Cota (DMV parking lot).

Tues. June 23 - Sun. June 28

Coastwalk will sponsor daily hikes along the coast between Rincon Beach and Point Sal. For details call Virginia Johnson, Coastwalk County Coordinator (962-5181) or Joy Parkinson, Registrar (964-6477).

From Ron Hirst's diary —

Birding in Venezuela

Jeff Chemnik, Jim Melli and I went to Venezuela for three weeks between March 24th and April 14th, renting a car and driving most of the length and breadth of the country. A goal was to find as many bird species as possible and we succeeded, but we also spent a good deal of time studying much more of the native fauna and flora. Jeff and Jim are exceptionally knowledgeable on tropical flora and were able to rattle off the specific or family name of almost every plant we saw!

From Caracas airport we drive 2 hours west along main roads until 12:30 a.m. We set up our cots on a grassy area and fall asleep. At first light, the first Venezuela bird soars by ... yes, ... it's a, a ... black vulture. Oh well, hundreds more follow. We bird the grassy area periphery and find 22 species including the bizarre barred antshrike, a wren-like bird in zebra stripes and with a spiky feathered crest.

We drive all morning towards the Andes and Henri Pittier National Park. Along the windy road to the biological station at the top we make 3 stops and add another 40 or so bird species. I get my first experience with the outrageously gaudy passerines found in tropical mixed flocks. We see golden, blue-necked, speckled and bay-headed tanagers plus euphonias, honeycreepers, vireos and warblers. Near the biological station (ranger station and hostel too) we add many birds including the spangled coquette (the "Phyllis Diller" hummingbird).

After staying the night at the station we are up early to wander forest trails on the grounds. Not many birds out in the thick cloud-forest early on, but later in the morning activity picks up and we call in a highly musical but secretive grey-breasted wood-wren. A couple of flocks go by. We get unlimited views and photos of a perched white-tipped quetzal and see a black-faced antthrush poking around in the leaf litter. Outside of the deep forest and on the mountain roadway nearby we locate many flocks: a long-tailed sylph flies by; brilliant blue male swallow tanagers and their emerald-striped mates are abundant. A black and white hawk eagle soars overhead. After a day and a half of this, we have ticked another 60 or so species and head on to our next Andean destination.

As we climb the high Andes we make occasional stops, and at one time Jim and I see the beautiful wire-tailed manakin. Up an obscure high Andean road, we reach an unspoiled area of stunning beauty. Even though it is the "dry" season in Venezuela, the high forests and pastures are lush and have many flowers. We locate the only known Venezuelan lek of the Andean cock-of-the-rock, a chicken sized, brilliant tangerine-orange forest bird. These birds are extremely rare in Venezuela and this lek area is being considered for park status. Within 30 feet of the lek tree we find 15 males calling and displaying, their calls sounding partway between a rooster and a parrot and reaching cacophonous heights.

The campsite in this area is idyllic: at night Jeff and Jim black-light for bugs and moths, although in general there are few bugs the whole trip (including mosquitoes), which I'm told is in sharp contrast to the rainy season. A crested quetzal and strange tree-dwelling mammals provide additional highlights here.

Our next major stop is a remnant cloud-forest preserve called the University of the Andes. This forest has wide trails, lush trees and orchids galore. Birding is so-so (25 species) but we do pick up the ultramarine blue masked flower-piercer on our four-mile hike.

(To be continued)

Conservation Notes

◆ **Endangered Species Act.** To reauthorize the Endangered Species Act, Congress *this* year must pass HR 4045 by Congressman Gerry Studds (Mass.). If you write only one letter or postcard to Washington this year on a legislative/conservation issue, the National Audubon Society, as our *highest national priority*, urges you to write in support of HR 4045. This is the one piece of federal legislation that specifically guards our nation's flora and fauna from depredation or extinction.

A well-financed cabal of mining, lumber, oil, land development and ultra-conservative political groups is actively lobbying to scuttle the Act this year, via repetitive propaganda that the Act is somehow injurious to jobs and business. *Absolutely false!*

John Turner, senior official at U.S. Fish & Wildlife (and himself a conservative Republican Wyoming rancher, hunter and politician) has testified clearly: out of 28,000 different studies and actions taken under the Endangered Species Act, *only three* firms could demonstrate clear economic damage.

Please educate all federal candidates about the value of reauthorizing the Endangered Species Act. Find out where they stand on this issue (from Ross Perot, Clinton and President Bush to Bob Lagomarsino, Michael Huffington and Gloria Ochoa locally). If they won't give you a specific answer, ask them why not? Remember, several "endangered" and "threatened" species on the federal list live right here in Santa Barbara County. They can't speak for themselves. Don't let them be destroyed needlessly!

◆ **Wetlands.** Congressman Don Edwards (Calif.) is carrying HR 404 to expand federal protection of threatened wetlands. A preliminary study by the National Academy of Sciences suggested 50% of existing national wetlands could be permanently lost during the next 15 years if new definitions proposed by Vice President Quayle's committee are enacted. The preliminary NAS study notes that 90% of California's historic wetlands have already been permanently lost over the last century. President Bush promised "no net loss of wetlands" when he ran in 1988, but now he is "ambivalent" on the

issue. Passing the Edwards Bill may refocus his mind.

Chapter President Ron Hirst and I have joined a wide array of conservation groups and government officials to oppose commercial development of the Los Carneros Wetlands (off Hollister in Goleta). Thanks in small part to our lobbying, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which exerts legal stewardship over the Los Carneros Wetlands, scheduled a public hearing locally to better gauge community reaction. Virtually all speakers were opposed. This is the same L.A. development company that capriciously bulldozed 100 willows several years ago, destroying the main habitat of the black-shouldered kite.

◆ **Owls and Trees.** Many chapter members have inquired about the status of federal legislation to protect our nation's "Ancient Forests." The bill in question is HR 4899, being carried by Interior Committee Chair George Miller (Calif.). Our Congressman, Bob Lagomarsino, sits on that committee. Let's help him "make up his mind." His Washington DC zip code is 20515.

Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan Jr. has personally ruled to continue logging vast tracts of old growth forests in the Northwest, despite the presence of the northern spotted owl, an endangered species. Looks like we have a federal "fox" guarding Nature's "chicken coop."

◆ **Sacramento Hotline.** A quick update on the status of any state environmental legislation can be obtained by writing John McCaull, Audubon's Sacramento legislative advisor, at 926 J Street, Room 618, Sacramento, 95814, or calling (916) 444-5557.

◆ **Goleta Valley.** Last stages for "Public Comment" for the EIR on the proposed Land Use Plan for the entire Goleta Valley, for the County Comprehensive Plan. Document available for review at the Goleta Library. If you have a favorite habitat zone or bit of open space, take a moment to assure that it will still be there in two or three years. Direct comments to Mr. Jeff Harris, S.B. County Resource Management Dept, 123 E. Anapamu St., Santa Barbara 93101.

-- Lee Moldaver

Help Wanted

Santa Barbara Audubon Society desperately needs you to volunteer for:

Testimony Presenters. We need self-starters who can tactfully and effectively present testimony at City Council and County levels, at hearings of governmental boards and agencies, usually on weekdays during daytime hours. Knowledge of Santa Barbara, politicians and who the players are is a big plus. A minimum of four hours a month is required. To volunteer, call Lee Moldaver, 682-2120.

Education Coordinator. A self-starter is needed to respond to requests from schools and other community groups for an Audubon speaker to address their groups. Responsibilities include phone work to schedule Audubon volunteers to give slide show presentations. Three to four hours a month is required. To volunteer, call Ron Hirst, 967-0138.

Public Display Coordinator. This creative, hard-working individual will arrange occasional public exhibits (at the Downtown Library, for instance) of Audubon exhibits relating to wildlife and habitat preservation. Our office is filled with wonderful educational materials, books, posters, etc. that can be creatively arranged to educate and inform the public on important issues. This position requires two hours a month. To volunteer, call Ron Hirst, 967-0138.

Wetlands Organizer. Our Wetlands Committee is now forming to bolster grassroots efforts to protect fragile wetlands in our area. Its initial goal will be to organize a full-day training workshop this fall for local wetland activists to identify and address major issues. Call Audubon's Wetlands Coordinator David Wass at 688-1082 to volunteer.

Hospitality Chair. This individual will coordinate other volunteers, to ensure refreshments are available at the monthly Audubon program meetings (the 4th Friday of each month) and, as needed, at other special Audubon functions like the Christmas Count potluck. This job takes one to two hours a month. To volunteer, call Carol Rae at 964-3827.

Wrentit (Continued from page 1)

trail late in the afternoon, with the view stretching out over Santa Barbara to the ocean, and the shadows lengthening over the chaparral into a purple haze, the wrentit's cry breaks the serenity of the evening. It is at once near and far, bearing a note of vague uneasiness. Perhaps the wrentit's song evokes a simpler, more natural Southern Califor-

nia, a place where the sunny foothills lay undisturbed beside the Pacific, and the footsteps of the Chumash Indians were the only intrusion upon the wrentit's world.

— *excerpted from Great Birding Trips of the West (Capra Press, 1989. Available in local bookstores or directly from the publisher for \$10.95) with kind permission of the author, Joan Lentz.*

Donors

We wish to thank the following members, friends and foundations for their generous donations. This list reflects contributions received from May 1991 to May 1992.

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The next *El Tecolote* will be issued in September

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

1991/1992

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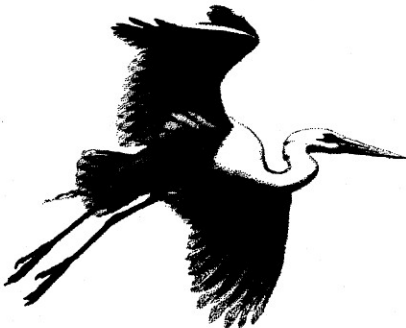


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