

Joe Morlan's Ornithology class March 26th, 2009

The dynamics of **Crows** and **Ravens** is a complex one. Neither species was very common in the Bay Area 30 years ago. The SF CBC would be hard pressed to get 20 Crows, and now there's Crows everywhere. It was probably not until the 1980s that the first Raven was recorded in an Oakland CBC. In the distant past Ravens and Crows were both shot. Crows may be an agricultural pest. Ravens less so because Ravens are not found in agricultural areas particularly. In general when you look at the distribution of Crows and Ravens you see they don't like each other much. When Joe lived in an apartment in Pacifica he would see the Ravens having territories and the Crows would periodically come in and harass these Ravens. They would eventually drive the Ravens out, and then the Crows would leave and the Ravens would come back. That happened over and over again. Ravens are expanding into areas that are more Crow friendly. Crows like more medium type climates, agricultural areas, towns and villages, valleys, orchards, with a relatively mild climate. You find Ravens in Death Valley, Alaska, the mountains, along the coast, anywhere that Crows are not found. They are capable of adapting to a wide variety of different regimes. They don't like to be in areas where crows are common.

Crows were rare in SF for a long time, there was a little area in the panhandle of GG Park where people used to come and look for Crows.

The Ravens are believed to have probably caused the decline and possible extinction of Pigeon Guillemot as a breeding bird in SF, they used to nest on the cliffs at the north end of SF and they rarely do now.

House Sparrow

HISTORY AND OCCURRENCE

Very widespread introduced species.

Introduced in New England and New York around the 1850s.

Sibley indicates that it spread to SF by 1910. That is not quite the way Joe understands it. He believes that in the 19th century House Sparrows were introduced simultaneously in many different parts of the US, including CA. They were introduced with the purpose of controlling noxious insects. In the late 19th century there was enormous argument about the continued introduction of the House Sparrow and the House Sparrow problem. Some people were strongly against introducing House Sparrows and felt that they could cause quite a lot of agricultural damage. Rather than controlling the insects they would eat the seeds. We do not know whether the House Sparrows in CA expanded from those in Boston and New York or whether or not they were offspring of populations that were introduced directly into CA. The birds spread so rapidly over the US in such a short period of time, basically 50 years, that there is no data like there is with the European Starling, that shows the march of these birds across the country. The dynamic of the introduction is essentially lost to prehistory.

The species seems to be preadapted to human disturbance and they frequently live in close proximity to human dwellings. In the 19th and early 20th century they expanded their range largely by following horses. They are grain feeders and there was grain spilled all over the place and House Sparrows were feeding largely on horse manure. They also were suspected of riding freight trains with animals and grain on them.

In some residential areas the House Sparrow is the only bird that occurs.

In the wild these birds weave a dome shaped nest of strong plant fibers with a hole in the side in the tops of trees. In practice they have modified their nesting behavior to build those nests behind the ivy that covers old buildings. Also they've become really good at taking over any type of a cavity in buildings, they just shove nesting material in there. Broken light standards are a favorite within the inner city where so many street lights are broken. They also will take over the nests of Cliff Swallows in a Cliff Swallow colony. They also are multi brooded and nest throughout the year.

Geographic variation has already evolved in American birds. Birds further north are larger, following Bergman's rule and birds in the arid southwest are paler, following Gloger's rule. An example of fairly rapid evolutionary progress.

Steady decline throughout the US in the last 20 years or so. The causes of this decline are unclear. A similar and even steeper decline has been found in Europe. In the US it is a little bit more understandable. Not an unusual pattern with an invasive exotic species, it blossoms, takes over and builds up an enormous population which is unsustainable and then drops down after natural selection starts to have some impact.

It is important to know the House Sparrow. You will not find this bird in the sparrow section in your field guide. Although it looks superficially like a sparrow it is not closely related to the sparrows. The male with its black bib has been confused with Harris's Sparrow or Black-chinned Sparrow or Black-throated Sparrow.

FIELD MARKS

Fairly large headed birds with fairly swollen bills.

Bill shape different than in the true sparrows (*Emberizidae*), in particular they don't have the notch at the cutting edge of the bill.

Essentially unstreaked gray underparts.

MALES

Bill blacker during the nesting season.

Gray crown.

Chestnut area on the back of the head.

Black bib, acquired by wear, fresh feathers are gray tipped and the black color is underneath, there is no prealternate molt, only one molt a year, the annual prebasic molt.

Upper wing bar obvious. It can be concealed by loose scapular feathers. It is formed by the tips of the median coverts (the same spot where the white trim is on a Tricolored Blackbird for example).

Lower wing bar quite faint. This is the reverse of the pattern of a lot of birds that have wing bars.

White collar on the side of the neck.

FEMALES AND IMMATURES

Some pink on the mandible.

Buff postocular stripe. On most birds at least in the wintertime quite eminent.

In the summer these feathers become more worn and the face can become quite a bit plainer, they can show a mostly gray face.

A little bit of buff at the side of the neck.

Lack much in the way of field marks and can be confused with a variety of other sparrows.

(The Golden-crowned Sparrow is a common bird in the Bay Area in the wintertime which is unstreaked below and has white wing bars and a relatively plain face.)

The stripes on the back are fairly strong and the bird does have a superficial resemblance to the female or immature Dickcissel. Sometimes, especially in the east, immature

Dickcissels associate in flocks of House Sparrows. That occasionally happens in CA, but it's quite rare.

VOCALIZATIONS

The song is hardly a song at all, it is a series of kind of annoying cheep, cheep, cheep.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

ORIGIN AND OCCURRENCE

Ranges from Europe into far East Asia where it replaces the House Sparrow ecologically.

In the early part of the 19th century there was a naturalization society that attempted to introduce all the birds that are named in the plays of Shakespeare. The House Sparrow is one of them. They tried to introduce the Goldfinch and the Skylark and lots of other birds. Most of them failed. The House Sparrow was very successful, as was the Starling. The Eurasian Tree Sparrow survived in a few places for a while but has managed to survive only in a relatively small area in the Midwest in the vicinity of St Luis, Missouri and adjacent Illinois. The population has never spread particularly far from there but there are enough areas in St Luis where there are lots of these Eurasian Tree Sparrows around. They've been self sustaining for a long period of time. It is possible that they will not expand much further because of competition from House Sparrows. They have some differences in their ecology. Both occur sympatrically in Europe but it might be a little more difficult for these birds to survive in the US, given all of the native species that they have to compete with.

Presumed escapes from captivity have been seen in CA, coming to feeding stations.

FIELD MARKS

Smaller than House Sparrows, smaller dark bill.

Males and females look alike.

Black bib only on throat, not extending down onto the breast.

Reddish crown.

Dark spot on the side of the face.

Wing bar pattern similar to House Sparrow.

Orange Bishop

ORIGIN AND OCCURRENCE

Common cage bird from Africa.

Used to be called Red Bishop which then was split. They are actually quite difficult to tell apart, having to do with the amount of black on the head.

Numerous species of bishops found in Africa that are extraordinarily difficult to tell apart in female type plumage.

Only one seems to be common in the cage bird trade.

Established locally in southern CA, primarily in ditches that have riparian growth and lots of weeds (reeds?)

Occasionally seen in SF.

FIELD MARKS OF FEMALE TYPE BIRDS

Female looks like the drabest sort of sparrow that you might imagine.

Males look like females in the nonbreeding season.

Really short stubby tail.

Very drab all over.

Big bill.

Nutmeg Mannikin

Aka Spice Finch or Spotted Munia.

ORIGIN AND OCCURRENCE

From southeast Asia where they are quite widespread around human habitation.

Established in southern CA, most notably in Huntington Central Park, there is a marsh there with a reed bed and that place is just popping with Nutmeg Mannikins.

FIELD MARKS

ADULTS

Dark chestnut brown with a black swollen bill and scaling underneath.

JUVENILES

Juvenal plumage lasts for months and months. The juveniles segregate from the adults and it's not unusual to see dozens of these solid brown birds with black bills that sort of look like female Indigo Buntings, except their bill is too big and they are really too plain. They are not flicking their tails like a bunting and they look top heavy.

Java Sparrow

Sibley p. 537

Aka Rice Bird

Common escape in some places, particularly Florida, has also been seen in CA but not often.

Yellow-fronted Canary

Sibley p. 537

Common escape.

Same size and shape as Goldfinch. Joe has seen it in Oakland associating with Lesser Goldfinches

Red-whiskered Bulbul

p. 366, there was a question about it

Bulbuls are an Old World family of medium sized birds, usually with a crest, often with a patch of red or yellow color on the undertail coverts. Almost all of them are preadapted to hanging around in developed areas or settlements and around people's houses.

The Red-whiskered Bulbul is found in southeast Asia.

In captivity to a lesser extent. They like to eat fruit, can be raised on bananas for example.

Most field guides have the Red-whiskered Bulbul because the AOU checklist has the species as introduced and established in Miami, Florida, near the town of Kendall. The population seems to have declined. There are all kinds of stories about how they got there, one of them involves

deliberate release prior to an Audubon Society field trip as a practical joke. There are also pretty good numbers in parts of Pasadena.

CA has slightly different standards for what they except as an introduced species than Florida or Texas has. We tend to be more conservative than other states. In general the rules for accepting an introduced birds for the state list involve 15 years of proven successful breeding. Also the bird must have a large enough range so that it is occupying all or nearly all appropriate habitat. Essentially there needs to be a situation where it is very unlikely that the population will disappear. Highly localized populations have a harder hurdle to make it on the official state list.

Accidentals and extinct species p466 ff

We discussed some of these this and the following week. All are listed here.

Graylag Goose

Commonly seen throughout NA, but those are escaped domestic geese. It is the progenitor of the common domestic goose. They don't act like wild birds and domestic ones are bigger than the genuine wild ones.

Lesser White-fronted Goose

Eurasian species. Some records in the Maritime Provinces. Birds that have been reported from CA are assumed to be escapes.

Light-mantled Albatross

A southern species. Somewhat controversial. There is one record in NA, a bird that was seen at the Cordell Bank in July 1994. Joe was on that boat. Rich Stallcup spotted it. They were able to turn the boat around, the bird landed, they pulled the boat right next to it and took lots of photographs of it. Some people couldn't quite believe that it could have gotten here on its own. It is a southern hemisphere species and in general the southern hemisphere albatrosses are blocked from reaching the northern hemisphere by the doldrums, an area along the equator that does not have any trade winds. Albatrosses need to have sustained winds in order to be able to traverse the oceans, which is why most of the are n the southern hemisphere. Never the less, other species of albatrosses presumably do cross the doldrums. The Light-mantled Albatross needed some other kind of explanation to get here, like somebody's pet, somebody's escaped cage bird. Or that somebody may have caught it on a fish hook. That does happen, especially certain kinds of long line fishing has caused quite a lot of damage to albatrosses. The albatrosses go after the fish that are on these long lines and they seize the fish and they get the hook embedded in their bill, and so when the long lines are pulled onto the boat there is bycatch that may include some albatrosses. They might keep the albatross on board as a pet, because once the thing sits here on the deck they cannot become airborne because they need a runway, these are big birds that need to get a running start. If you have a small boat you can put an albatross there and take it anywhere, you don't have to do anything to keep it from flying away. They are not afraid of people because they live on remote oceanic islands where people don't live. They call them gooney birds in parts of Hawaii. You can walk right up to them on their nesting grounds, they have no particular fear of human beings.

Wandering Albatross

Only one NA record, from CA. One of the great albatrosses, huge wing span. The NA record is not based on any birdwatcher or ornithologist seeing the bird, it is based on photographs that appeared in a local newspaper. The bird was found on a golf course at Sea Ranch and was

photographed and the local Sea Ranch weekly appearing newspaper put it on their front page. "Big goony bird visits Sea Ranch" The photos included one with the bird having its wings spread up which is really helpful in distinguishing it from the similar Royal Albatross. Now we have a situation where the wandering Albatross has been split by some of the Australians into as many as five different species. It's going to be a task for somebody to go back through those newspaper clippings and try to figure out which one of those this one may have actually been. Notice that the adult bird looks a lot like the adult Short-tailed Albatross (p78) which is almost as big. Notice the pale pink bill, white body, dark wings and white wing linings. There seems to be more white on the upper surface of the wing of the Short-tailed Albatross. Short-tailed Albatross is extraordinarily rare world wide, it nests only on one or two islands off Japan. It is one of those species that are suffering from long line fishing in the Bering Sea. A lot of research right now. They have monitors on a lot of those boats to check for albatross bycatch. There was an immature bird photographed off of Oregon this year that was also being believed to be a Wandering Albatross. Those birds are all brown with a white face. It takes a Wandering Albatross many years before it gets to be fully adult.

Black-bellied Storm-Petrel

Was photographed by accident off the North Carolina coast by Brian Patteson who runs pelagic trips there. Brian Patteson was photographing Wilson's and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels and out of the camera came this perfectly clear picture of a Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, a bird from the southern hemisphere. (Additional information from the internet: Three unambiguous Black-bellied Storm-Petrels have been now been photo-documented off North Carolina (31 May 2004, 16 July 2006 & 23 June 2007).)

Ringed Storm-Petrel

Aka Hornby's Storm-Petrel

One of the most distinctive Storm-Petrels in the whole world, much, much easier to identify than any of these others. It was photographed knowingly by Peter Pyle and other researchers off San Miguel Island on a research cruise out on deep water. The bird is very poorly known. Most records are off the central west coast of South America. Breeding grounds unknown, may be in the high Andes.

Nazca Booby

A split from Masked Booby. Masked Booby occurs in Florida and there are records from CA. On Clipperton Island there are two kinds of Masked Boobies that breed together and mate assortatively, i.e. they avoid mating with the opposite type. Nazca Booby has a bright yellow or pinkish colored bill, while the typical Masked Booby has a darker olive or olive-yellow colored bill. The birds are relatively easy to identify when they are adults. Identification of immature birds is quite another matter. The ones on the Galapagos Islands are all Nazca Boobies. They are by no means endemic to the Galapagos Islands, which is what the naturalists there try to say, they range on breeding islands all the way up to Clipperton where they overlap the breeding range of the Masked Booby.

There are a number of records of immature Masked-type boobies from CA and the identity of those birds is unclear, we are assuming that they are Masked Boobies. An immature bird showed up on a boat in San Diego. The bird was not healthy and was taken into rehab and died eventually. The bird had such a bright colored bill that there was immediate suspicion that it was a Nazca Booby and it had no white collar on the neck. It seems that the white collar on the back of the neck is indicative of Masked while the lack of it is more indicative of Nazca, but the extent to which these are reliable is still being worked on. The bird was prepared as a specimen and tissue samples were sent to a researcher in Canada. The tissue was identified as matching Nazca

Booby. Without the tissue sampling the bird could probably not have been confidently identified. The bird was submitted to the California Bird Records Committee along with an account of how the bird was found on a fishing boat and came on board the boat in Mexico. It came to San Diego and flew off the boat onto the pier and then was taken into captivity and then died. It was rejected by the committee because it did not occur naturally in CA. That is a category which is normally used when people submit their Eurasian Tree Sparrows and you think it came out of a cage. It is not normally used for a bird that you think may or may not have been ship assisted, especially when riding a ship is a normal part of the bird's natural history. Every booby that has been seen in CA has unquestionable been on a ship at some time in its life. Boobies always ride fishing boats, that is their main mode of transportation. Wherever you go in the tropics you will see frigatebirds and boobies riding boats.

Great Frigatebird

Two records from CA, one from the Farallones, one from Monterey Bay. Frigatebirds are very rare in CA, most records are of the Magnificent Frigatebird, which breeds off Mexico. The males look almost identical. Joe saw both species on the Galapagos. There is a difference in their foot color, the orbital ring is different (red in Great) and some differences in the pattern of the back. Adult females are pretty easy to tell apart, with a white chin and throat on the Great and an all black hood with dark chin and throat on the female Magnificent. The immatures are very similar but in general Magnificent have a white head and the Great immatures tend to have a cinnamon wash over the head. Both species about the same size. Fregata minor actually means Lesser Frigatebird, this English name applies to the next species.

Lesser Frigatebird

Another frigatebird from the southern oceans. There is also a record from CA, a bird photographed in July 2007 at Humboldt Bay near Arcata. It was an immature bird with a very rusty head. Article in North American Birds:

[http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/ralph/psw_2007_ralph\(sullivan\)002.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/ralph/psw_2007_ralph(sullivan)002.pdf)

Gray Heron

Replaces the Great Blue Heron in Eurasia. Has occurred as a vagrant at the east coast and apparently in Alaska. Shorter legs, lacks the rufous coloration on the thighs and marginal coverts. It would be very easy to overlook a Gray Heron if one would show up. Many of the young Great Blue Herons do not have that rusty coloration. There are some subtle differences in shape that would need to be used.

Chinese Egret

A very rare bird from east Asia, there is apparently a record from Alaska

Western Reef-Heron

A polymorphic Old World species, white and dark morph. The dark morph is all dark slaty colored with a white chin and throat. Black legs with yellow feet. The white morph birds look a lot like a Little Egret or a Snowy Egret. These birds are frequently seen along the ocean foraging in the inner tidal area. Species does occur in Asia, no records on the west coast though. There is some evidence that it may in fact be the same species as Little Egret, there was some work done in Germany suggesting that. The taxonomy is quite complex.

Crane Hawk

A Texas vagrant from Mexico. Quite a striking bird with very long red legs. Not a very common bird anywhere. A lot of people claim to have seen it in Texas and were actually looking at something else. It has some resemblance to Hook-billed Kite.

Collared Falcon

A very shy secretive bird in Mexico, much more often heard than seen, one Texas record.

Red-footed Falcon

One of the birds of the century. Eastern European highly migratory falcon about the size of a Kestrel that spent part of a summer on Martha's Vineyard.

Paint-billed Crane, Spotted Rail

Tropical species, very poorly known because they are rails and nocturnal, they hang around in the swamps, they are known from very few specimens and mostly people hear them, we know almost nothing about their life history. Like a lot of rails some of them seem to have the capability of long distance flight even though they appear to be barely able to fly when you encounter them, which is why most islands in the oceans have rails on them, most of them having evolved flightlessness after they arrived on some of these remote, inaccessible islands. The occurrences of these birds have been questioned, it looks like they are both accepted right now.

Double-striped Thick-knee

Some Texas records. For a long time there was one in Yuma, Arizona on a golf course. People went there to see it and then it turned out it was an escaped captive. Somebody actually transported it from Mexico up to this golf course and let it go.

Greater Sand-Plover

Only one record for NA. Bolinas Lagoon, Jan-Apr 2001. Point Reyes Bird Observatory does regular shorebird surveys at Bolinas Lagoon and on that survey they recorded a Snowy Plover, which is a pretty unusual bird for Bolinas Lagoon. So they went back and concluded it might not be a Snowy Plover, it might be some type of Sand-Plover. There is a Lesser Sand-Plover, formerly known as Mongolian Plover, that has occurred in CA. These Sand-Plovers do not have a ring around the back of the neck. However, this bird did not quite fit Lesser Sand-Plover, which has a shorter bill, usually darker legs. Greater Sand-Plover seemed quite improbable since the species had never been recorded in Alaska or Siberia. It has been recorded in China, it gets to the central Asian coasts, there are numerous populations all the way out into Africa, most of them are not particularly migratory.

Black-winged Stilt

The representative in Eurasia of our Black-necked Stilt, has been recorded in Alaska. One seen at the Salton Sea was eventually identified as a partially albino Black-necked Stilt.

Oriental Pratincole

Pratincoles are highly modified shorebirds that have an ecology sort of like swallows. They sweep around with neatly swept back wings and glide over lakes and stuff feeding on flying insects for the most part, very striking birds. There are numerous species in the Old World, none in the New World. The first NA record on Attu Island 19 May 1985, it was collected the next day. There were two bird tours on Attu Island. It is so difficult to get there that they combined forces,

used the economics of scale. There is no place to stay but the abandoned Loran station. It is a very expensive thing to do and the living conditions are very harsh and grim up there. They do in Alaska still routinely collect vagrants that would be new to the Alaska list, it's old school ornithology, they believe that the specimen is the best evidence that there is. People were not told that there was going to be collecting on this trip. People assumed that it was a birdwatching trip, that if there was going to be collecting that they would hear about it. A number of those people were strongly anti-collecting, and the people that were known to be anti-collecting were kept in the dark about the collecting that was going on. One photographer in particular was trying to photograph this Oriental Pratincole days after the bird was known to be in a box and nobody told him that he was wasting his time going out to where the pratincole had been. He thought it was important to get a picture of it to document it when they already had it in a box.

Whiskered Tern

A marsh tern, in the same genus as the Black Tern and the White-winged Tern. The Whiskered Tern is like a marsh tern but it got a plumage more like a more typical *Sterna* tern.

Carolina Parakeet

Was never particularly common. The last one died in the same zoo where the last Passenger Pigeon had died four years earlier.

Oriental Scops-Owl

Closely related to our Screech-Owls

Mottled Owl

Closely related to the wood owls (genus *Strix*) but in a different genus now. First find a road killed specimen in Texas. It might have flown there and got hit in place. It also might have been hit by a truck in Mexico and brought there on the grill of the truck! There are records from Common Black Hawk from Wisconsin that are believed to have been transported by truck on the grill.

Stygian Owl

One of the most mysterious and iconic of all owls. Neotropical species, very poorly known.

Bumblebee Hummingbird

Very unclear whether or not the specimen are acceptable. One of the things about dealing with specimen from 1896 is whether or not the locality data on the tag is correct. This is particularly problematic with seabirds, where the tag would have the name of the port of entry on it rather than the locality where the bird was collected. And in fact in the 19th century nobody really cared where birds were collected, what they cared about was the specimen itself. What mattered was what the bird was, not where or even when it was collected. They used typological thinking, everything was according to a type, these were not evolutionary ideas. Where a bird occurred was not considered to be of any particular significance and not important part of the data.

Eurasian Wryneck

The world's smallest billed woodpecker. It is actually a woodpecker though it doesn't act like one. Its bill is not very long but it has a really long tongue.

Elaenias

Tropical American flycatchers that feed as much on fruit as they do on insects. When they attack fruit they attack it as though it was alive, like it was about to fly away. When they feed on the berries they flutter their wings and go after the berries as though they were going after insects, so they use flycatching behavior.

Social Flycatcher

Pretty common in the American tropics. A lot of people think they see Social Flycatchers and what they actually see are Kiskadees. Much smaller bill, lack of any reddish coloration on the tail or wings of the Social Flycatcher. One authority wrote that the bird really should be called the Antisocial Flycatcher because it is seldom found in flocks, the only time you can see multiple birds is when they are paired up.

Eurasian Blackbird

Ecological equivalent and closely related to the American Robin, same size and shape and very similar behavior and ecology. The male is all black and the bird was called Blackbird in Europe, a term later applied to the icterids, a totally different family, in America.

There is another bird in Europe called Robin which is a different bird, not very closely related to the American Robin. It does have a red chest.

There are a couple of species in the tropics that look a whole lot like the Eurasian Blackbird.

Citrine Wagtail

Wagtails are Old World birds, the ones that occur here are mostly vagrants from East Asia. White Wagtail and Eastern Yellow Wagtail are the two that have been found in CA.

Citrine Wagtail looks like a Hermit Warbler that has morphed into a wagtail. One NA record, which has had an impact on claims of Eastern Yellow Wagtail in places like CA. The Eastern Yellow Wagtail has a very distinctive call and is a flitty bird. A number of the claims of Eastern Yellow Wagtail are based on birds seen very briefly or flyovers giving the distinctive flight call. They are generally identified by people that have experience in Alaska with Eastern Yellow Wagtail, which breeds there. Now, because of the occurrence of Citrine Wagtail in Mississippi, members of the committee are starting to get very cautious about this, because nobody seems to know how to tell Citrine Wagtail from Eastern Yellow Wagtail when they fly over and call.

Tree Pipit

Red-throated Pipit somewhat similar, pale stripes on the back, but it is more heavily marked on the breast. Olive-backed Pipit (also called Olive Tree Pipit) has an olive back which is pretty solidly marked as well as heavier markings on the underparts. The Olive-backed Pipit is the Asiatic representative of the Tree Pipit, which is somewhat more European but does overlap the Olive-backed Pipit. Tree pipits are more likely to be seen in trees than most other species of pipits, that are mostly ground feeders or occur on rocky terrain or in pastures. The first record of Olive-backed Pipit was collected near Reno, Nevada. The reason the person collected it was that it was flying around landing on the tops of bushes, a somewhat unusual behavior for a pipit.

Gray Silky-flycatcher

A rather spectacular bird in the Phainopepla family, the Silky-flycatcher family. A Mexican species that reaches fairly far down into Central America. What was questioned on the CA records was not the birds' origin, but whether or not they occurred naturally! A couple of them were photographed. One was during a major migration in San Diego. There is one record from the mountains of Orange county in early 1999. A guy posted that he had seen a bird he could not

identify and gave a wonderful description of a Gray Silky-flycatcher. The bird was associating with a flock of Phainopeplas that were foraging on mistletoe berries. This was by the Blue Jay campground in Cleveland National Forest, in a really remote part of Orange County.

How do you know whether a bird like that is wild or whether it's an escape? One of the things you look for is a pattern of occurrence. The other thing you look for is whether or not the bird's normal behavior is migratory and whether or not its migratory behavior is plausible in terms of bringing the bird to where it is.

The bird is a montane species. The other CA records were all in residential areas along the coast. There also was a sighting by Rich Stallcup somewhere in Arizona of a flyby that he never submitted because it was a flyby.

It is added to the CA supplemental list. Those are birds that have passed the identification level, there is evidence that they were correctly identified, and the only reason that they are not on the state list is that there are questions about their natural occurrence. A substantial number of members of the committee thought that their occurrence might be natural. The birds are on the list pending further records.

After the record was rejected Joe got an email from somebody in Mexico who says that they spend the winters at a particular place where they never see Gray Silky-flycatchers, but that winter was a huge invasion of them into the lowlands, there was a major movement of these birds.

They are dependent on fruit and are erratic in a way because sometimes the food supply fails and the birds are forced into new areas. So even though the bird is not considered to be highly migratory it is capable of some reasonable movements.

They are fairly common in captivity in Mexico, they are easily raised on bananas.

Joe thinks the committee process works fairly well when it comes to trying to establish a baseline in terms of field identification, but when it comes to divining which birds are wild, naturally occurring birds and which ones are escaped captives the committee's guess is as good as anybody else's.

Worthen's Sparrow

One of the most mysterious of the birds on this list. It has a close resemblance to the Field Sparrow of the eastern US. It differs slightly in the shape and in particular in the color of its legs which are black. Its range is highly restricted, it occurs in a teeny little place in northern Mexico. The type specimen was collected at Silver City, New Mexico in 1884. The question is, was it really collected in Silver City? Or was it collected in Mexico and brought to Silver City? Or did somebody just put Silver City on the label because that was the nearest town? Or was there a thriving population of Worthen's Sparrows in New Mexico in the 19th century?

Eurasian Siskin

The females resemble some of the bright Pine Siskins. Discussed recently when discussing Pine Siskin.