

Central and Coastal Northern California Spring Trip, 2009

by Sylvia R. Gallagher

INTRODUCTION. My husband Jim is a bird photographer and I am a bird sound recordist. We use the photos and sounds in Birding Skills Workshops and other programs I prepare for Sea and Sage Audubon. When home in Huntington Beach, California, I work hard (too hard this past year!) preparing and presenting birding workshops. Then we try to take off for several months each year in our Chevy Suburban with our old 26-foot trailer in tow and get more photos and sounds—and also get some time to just relax and enjoy being in beautiful places. Our three-year-old miniature poodle, Toby, accompanies us.

This spring we only had two months, so decided to stay close to home. We had planned to go north along the coast and then visit several places in the Sierra Nevada on our way south. But the coast was so delightful, we couldn't tear ourselves away from it. Furthermore, the interior of the state became extremely hot in June.

I want to thank Jim for critically editing this text—twice. His helpful additions, comments about things that were unclear, and eagle-eye for stupid typos all helped make this a much better diary.

[Comments in square brackets were written after we got home and had evaluated the photos and sounds.]

Thursday, April 23, 2009

River Bend RV Park, Kernville

We left home around 9:30 Sunday morning, April 19. We had only been on the road about 20 minutes when I thought to ask Jim if he had brought the Pocketmail device, which we use for email. He hadn't, so we went back for it—and also a jacket he thought would be nice to have.

It had been pretty hot and was expected to be that way for the next several days, so we headed for Tehachapi. I had saved the brochure on the RV park we had liked there many years ago, so found the place with no trouble. (I had also checked its website to be sure it was still in business, for Trailer Life Guide no longer lists it.) However, when we got there, it turned out that the section up the hill with widely spaced electric-only sites doesn't open until June nowadays. We'd have had to park right next to other trailers in a full hook-up site, so we decided to forget that and head for Galileo Hill, heat or no heat.

The Silver Saddle Resort there has 20 RV sites, and most of them had trailers in them, but we learned later that the resort owns them and rents them out. None was occupied, and our favorite site, #19, was free. It's nice and shady and the security light is directly in front of the trailer, so it doesn't shine into our bedroom window. Even though the temperature got up to 94°, the AC did its job nicely every day. We stayed there three nights.

I was so exhausted from finishing up teaching a difficult advanced class in bird sound identification, doing last minute chores, and packing the trailer, that I did nothing but sit around all day Monday, April 20. All I did was take a very short walk before breakfast.

Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, April 21 & 22, I had more energy and spent the entire time wandering all over the grounds. All the trees were full of migrants--all but one the usual expected western ones, but still lots of fun to see them in such numbers. Ninety per cent of them were Yellow-

rumped Warblers, but with the abundance, there were still a tremendous number of other birds. I did a little recording, but don't think I got anything particularly memorable. [Correct]

Each day we were there we had the place to ourselves except for a couple of birders who had dropped in for a few hours. Curiously enough all were people we knew. Monday, it was Suzanne & Glenn Chappell; Tuesday it was John Kelly and William Heckman. Suzanne and John just finished the Learning More California Bird Sounds workshop with me. The other two had taken workshops from me in the past. Wednesday, it was a couple who only made contact with Jim. He said the man told him he had once taken one of my classes, but Jim didn't get his name. Small world!

The birding highlight was a Northern Waterthrush (April 21), which John and William had found earlier. They refound it for me right after lunch and it was singing as well as calling—and not far from the trailer. Unfortunately, by that time, I was sitting outside in my lounge chair and my recording gear was in the trailer, so I didn't get its song. (I do have it from other trips to where it belongs.) Jim looked for it for several hours Wednesday morning while I was wandering the grounds, but had no success.

Late in the morning Wednesday, April 22, we drove north to Inyokern and found a site in a private RV park, Bertrand's Mobile Home & RV Park. It was satisfactory—nice quiet neighbors and some shade—but nothing special. Our reason for going there was to visit the home of Terri and Ed Middlemiss, where Le Conte's Thrashers are supposed to be dependable. The Chappells had seen one there on Monday morning. We got there at 6:30 am this morning and stayed until around 9:00. Terri Middlemiss spreads meal worms on the ground and covers them with birdseed. Unfortunately, it turned out that Monday morning was the last day of many months of regular appearances that the bird came in. Terri said the bird had been singing regularly, but seemed not to have a mate. She thought it had finally given up.

There were lots of other birds on her large piece of property. She has seed feeders, water drips, etc., all over an acre or so of desert. Her water faucet was a wonder to behold. It had splitters and the splitters had splitters, etc. There must have been 15 hoses protruding. Each one was wrapped in a different combination of colored tape and colored streamer--so she'd know which one went where, I figured. I should have taken a picture, but my camera was back in the Suburban.

Just before we got there, another photographer had obtained a digital image of a Tennessee Warbler, but it never returned. I saw the picture, so know he ID'd it correctly. Syrup feeders were attracting Costa's Hummers and Verdins, Bullock's & Hooded Orioles. I had seen none of these species at Galileo Hill, although I did hear Verdins.

After giving up on the Le Conte's Thrasher, we went back and got the trailer and Toby (our miniature poodle) and headed for Kernville via the beautiful drive over Walker Pass. We obtained a nice full-hookup site here at the River Nook RV Park, where we spent nearly a month several years ago. This time we paid for a week. Temperature is only in the upper 70's here, much nicer than in the desert. We'll probably just explore the campground & vicinity the rest of today, then go to the Kern River Preserve (KRP) tomorrow. My goal is to greatly improve my recordings of Lawrence's Goldfinches and Tricolored Blackbirds.

5:00 p.m., Sunday, April 26, 2009

Kernville

Saturday morning, April 24, was pretty windy, but we went to the KRP. I spent the entire morning walking around the section west of the headquarters, where Bob Barnes showed me some Lawrence's Goldfinches several years ago. I did find a couple of pairs, and one was doing a little singing, but it was very hard to hear its soft song—softer than other goldfinches—over the wind. I don't know if I got anything worthwhile or not. When they flew off into the bushes, I know I got the

little "ti-ti-ti-ti" call. They came out again, and a pair of Lessers came in, too, but I didn't hear anything from either. They were feeding on the flowers of a lush patch of fiddleneck--the nicest one I saw. [The recordings were poor.]

I walked all the way to the end of the preserve in that direction—probably a mile—then back. Meanwhile, Jim stayed around the visitors center area, where there are all sorts of bird feeders. He tried for the pair of Summer Tanagers that like the grove of cottonwoods just west of the parking lot, but had no success. He did shoot photos of Lesser and American Goldfinches.

By noon the wind was impossibly strong, so we spent the rest of the day in the trailer.

Yesterday, Saturday, April 25, was incredibly windy and also very cold. So we sort of slept in—for us—until around 7:00. I made pancake batter, which I like to let stand in the refrigerator for an hour before baking. Around 9:00 we took a short drive north up the canyon of the North Fork of the Kern River, stopping several places to look for birds. I doubt I saw more than ten birds the whole morning. At one spot we walked the entire loop of a campground that isn't yet open for the season. When I was standing in the howling wind right next to the rushing river, I heard a funny high whistle—over and over at intervals of 3-4 seconds. I was about to dismiss it as a squirrel or chipmunk, but then I caught sight of a Brewer's Blackbird. It was obviously the bird making the sound, for its tail flicked whenever I heard it. The song of that bird is pretty puny, and it's a wonder I was able to hear even that one note of it. Needless to say, I hadn't carried my tape recorder with me. All I'd have gotten would have been wind whistling over the mic.

We also walked around the fish hatchery grounds, where I heard Song Sparrow and Oak Titmouse. This might be a good little birding spot in calmer weather.

The rest of the day was spent in the trailer out of the wind, getting caught up on my reading.

This morning, Sunday, April 26, was nice and calm for several hours, then a breeze got up. Temperature was 39° and rose to a high of about 70°. Nice day! We went back to the KRP, where I had high hopes of getting Lawrence's Goldfinch songs well. We got there around 7:30 and I wandered all over the area where they occur and spent maybe half an hour where I saw them the other day. But I didn't see or hear any sign of one. What a disappointment.

I got back to the visitors center area, saw the Summer Tanagers in the interior of the woodland. I told Jim about them and he went and stood there a long time with his flash, but saw no sign of them. Again I heard no sound from either bird.

Meanwhile I walked the official nature trail through a more wooded section of the preserve. I heard lots of House Wrens, Bullock's Orioles, Song Sparrows, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Common Yellowthroats, and smaller numbers of a few others. I think I really improved my Bullock's Oriole recordings with songs and a variety of calls from two different individuals.

By the time I got back to the headquarters area, I was exhausted and dropped down on the first bench I came to. It had a hummingbird feeder and a birdseed feeder in view. The birdseed was mainly being patronized by Red-winged Blackbirds, but after I'd been watching the group a while, a Tricolored Blackbird came in, then another. I thought some of the calls when they flew up intermittently might have come from them, but I don't know for sure; Red-wings make so many themselves. After observing them for a while and getting all the sound I could, I called Jim over on the radio and he stood there a long time, but they never came back down. I think they would have if they had been hungry, because he was no closer than I had been. He was trying to get a group shot of Red-wings and Tricolors together. I could really see the differences in the shade of red (more purplish on Tricolor), shade of black (glossier and with no hints of brown), and size (slightly smaller).

I was a little too far away to appreciate the differences in bill shape, which I know exist. All except one of the birds were males. I don't know which species the female was.

Meanwhile I backed off and stood under a tree right behind the visitors center. After a while I started hearing the "sick cat" song of a Tricolor right over my head! It sang and gave little "chut" calls for a long time, and I'm sure I got some really nice recordings. That was one of my main goals for this trip, so I was pretty happy. It was almost 1:00 when we got away and went back to the trailer for a late lunch. Part of the extra time was spent with me serving as interpreter of the birds at the feeders. No one was in attendance at the office today. I just couldn't walk away and not help people figure out the goldfinches and orioles. A college ornithology class from Cal Poly, SLO, was also there and were eating lunch and milling around afterwards. Three students came up right after I finished recording the Tricolors in the treetops, and I told them what was there. Two of the kids just walked off and didn't even raise their binocs to try to see the bird! But the third, a young man, was very interested. He didn't know much about the bird or that it was being assessed for Endangered or Threatened status. I told him a lot about them and their life style, and he wrote a lot of it down in what looked like a very neat journal. He only left when their instructor called them together for a walk. Jim said that while I was doing that, he got some nice shots of a pair of Western Bluebirds and a singing California Thrasher in the preserve's parking lot.

4:45 p.m., Tuesday, April 28, 2009 Kernville

Yesterday morning, Monday, April 27, we went to Canebrake State Reserve, which is at mile 66.6 on State Hwy 178. You have to watch the mileposts very carefully to find the place. Although it is open to the public and even has a nice wheelchair-accessible trail, there's no sign on the highway. You just watch for a closed gate on the north side of the road. Open it, drive through, close it, then drive a short distance to the small parking area. The trail descends through Joshua Trees and sagebrush to Canebrake Creek, where there is a footbridge. This is a beautiful riparian area with towering cottonwoods. A bit farther there is standing water and large Red Willows on both sides of the trail almost meeting over the top. Finally you come out into a more open area with private pasture on one side and willow-riparian on the other. The entire trail must be about 1/4 mile long.

The main attraction near the beginning of the trail was Summer Tanagers singing from the treetops. I didn't hear any of their "chicky-tuck" calls, though. The willow corridor was rather quiet, with mainly Wilson's Warblers. I walked on to the end of the trail, then started back. That was when the fun began.

I caught sight of a flycatcher that looked sort of like a Dusky, and may have been one, but later I got a good look at a Gray, so that's probably what I saw initially, too. I stood around where that bird was for a long time, hoping for a snatch of call or song. I did hear some "whit" sounds, but never when I was very close, so don't know if they were from that bird or if I was just hearing poor versions of something else. Will have to wait until I get home and analyze my recordings. [I got nothing.]

While I was standing there I heard and recorded one loud "kid kid kid kid. . ." from the wet area below the willows. It didn't go on to "kid-ik kid-ik ...," but it had to be a Virginia Rail. I stood around some more, hoping it would repeat itself or give one of its other calls, but no luck.

While I was standing there, I became aware of what I thought initially were Red-winged Blackbirds, flying in tight flocks of 10 to 50 from the pasture to far away in the wetlands. It seemed to be strange behavior for Red-wings, and sure enough, they were Tricolors. They always seemed to be crossing over the trail at one particular place--where there was a gap in the willows, so I went down there. (When walking from the parking lot, this place is just before you come to an abandoned house on the right.) I walked up a gentle slope to the access gate to the pasture. From that height I

could see tight groups of Tricolors down in the pasture. They were mostly hidden, but they have a curious method of feeding. The flock moves gradually in one direction and at intervals the rear portion of the flock flies over the leading birds and drops down. This is repeated every few seconds, creating sort of a "roll-over" effect. I have no idea how many birds were down there in the grass, but every so often a group of them would fly right past my head, and head off maybe 200 yd. before disappearing in the far portion of the wetlands. I know they nest in very tight colonies. (Dave Bontrager in his remarks for the Orange County Breeding Bird Atlas commented that sometimes one nest will be right over another and the lower one receives the droppings of the upper one.) For me the best part of it all was the calls. As they flew past me, I recorded an incredible variety of them. In this respect they are much like Red-wings, but all have the same low nasal quality that the song has.

The day had been perfectly calm at first, but by the time I was recording the Tricolors, it was moderately breezy. I really don't think they were flying over when I first passed that area, but maybe I didn't notice them. I suspect they were still brooding their chicks in the morning chill of low 40s.

It was 11:00 when we got away and we had arrived at 7:30. We had several errands to run enroute home, so it was 1:00 when we got back to the trailer.

This morning, April 28, there was wind from the start. We drove south from Weldon through the Kelso Creek Valley, hoping for a repeat of the Blue Grosbeaks I remember in the grain fields on a previous trip, but no luck. I spent a little time where the road passes very close to the creek, but got nothing remarkable. In one sheltered spot, I did get a nice easy mix of four species that will be an interesting practice piece for an intro. sounds workshop sometime.

It was still early when we got back to the main highway. (I didn't want to drive all the way to Butterbredt Springs in that gale.) We decided to spend a little more time at the KRP. Jim headed for the feeder that the Tricolored Blackbirds like—the one beyond the visitors center. This time he got a few photos.

I decided to try once more for Lawrence's Goldfinch. I saw two males, and the second one was in a vaguely sheltered area (same lush patch of fiddleneck where I saw two before), so I decided to try for some recordings despite the wind. At first I saw only a dozen or so Lessers. As I was recording them, I began to hear what sounded more like the tinkly sound of a Lawrence's song. Then it began to sound more like a Lesser song, so I wasn't sure. This afternoon I brought the tape in, digitized the sound and deleted some of the wind. I discovered I had indeed recorded both birds. What had confused me was that I had about 30 seconds of Lawrence's, then a Lesser started to sing, too, for about 10 seconds. Finally it was only Lesser. Later, after the male Lawrence's came down and started feeding with the Lessers, I got quite a bit of the high "ti-ti-ti-ti" calls of Lawrence's mixed with occasional downslurred calls of the Lessers. I really had to look at the sonograms and listen to the cleaned up recordings to tell what I had. Raven Lite software allows me to remove the low frequencies of the wind, making the sounds much better. [They're still only so-so.]

It seems as though Lawrence's Goldfinches are only to be found on windy days. The 2 days I've found them have been that way, and on the calm day I saw no sign of one.

4:45 p.m., Wednesday, April 29, 2009 Kernville

We paid for a week here in Kernville, and this was our last day. When we decided to stay a week, we thought we might drive up into the mountains a couple of days, but it's been so cold at this elevation that we've had no desire to do that. However, the days we've spent at KRP and Canebroke have been very productive for me, and somewhat so for Jim. Today, I thought it might be nice to

make one last visit to Canebrake. I gave Jim the nearly impossible assignment of trying to capture a few shots of the Tricolored Blackbirds feeding in the pasture and doing the "rollover" behavior. We got there around 8:30, and I thought he'd have to wait a while for any action at all, and he said it was 45 minutes before any birds came. After that, he did get some photo opportunities and tried his best for the remainder of the morning. He used his 500-mm lens and said as we were walking back to the truck that he could have used his 300 and his 70-200 as well, but it was too much of a walk to go get them—and then to carry all those lenses, because he wouldn't want to be without his 500. [The slides were great and really showed the action I wanted to get.]

Meanwhile I walked the entire length of the trail; signs say in no uncertain terms to stay on it! I discovered that the end of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act, wheelchair accessible) portion of the trail didn't really mean the end of the trail. All I had to do was walk out through the gate at the end, cross the farmer's road, then open the gate on the other side, and I was on another portion of the trail that continued maybe a quarter mile farther. This trail had apparently been ADA at one time, but the first 100 feet or so had buckled and cracked and had weeds growing up through the cracks. I think it was laid down over wet soil. After that it became as good as the original part.

The day had been forecast to be windy, but for most of the morning it was almost totally calm. Then it became merely breezy, and if I found sheltered places, I could still record. I did lots of it, too. At first there were bawling cattle in the pasture (I recorded one bass bull that really made us laugh), but later they had gone elsewhere and become quiet. I got lots of #1 and #2 (scale of 10 with 1 being best) recordings of common species. Those top-quality sounds are always hard to come by. A Mourning Dove was particularly cooperative and gave complete and incomplete songs and wing whistles repeatedly when I was very close. That bird has always been hard to get well—very easy to get in the background, though. An Oak Titmouse surprised me, for there are no oaks around. He sang two song types and one had notes almost identical to a House Wren, but without the variety. Is that bird a mimic? [The Birds of North America doesn't mention it one way or the other.] Certainly there were many House Wrens to imitate.

When I walked back, the Tricolored Blackbirds were out. I was able to sneak up behind some shrubs on a small flock foraging in the edge of the pasture and get their quiet "chup" feeding calls. That call was all they did while feeding. As I continued, I discovered the flocks were more dispersed all over the pasture than they had been the other day. Furthermore, the small flocks flew back to their nests by all sorts of routes. I was unable to get any more of the nice flight calls that I got the other day.

When I was almost back to the footbridge near the start of the trail, I heard a Summer Tanager singing a near solo not far back, so returned and recorded his song for a while. I was certainly glad I did, because as I retraced my steps to the bridge I began to hear the "long growl" song that could only be a Tricolored Blackbird. I had read that they make such a song, but had only recorded the "short growl" at KRP the other day. This growl was even longer than anything on the three commercial recordings I usually use as references for sounds (Keller-California, Stokes West, and Peterson West). I think I probably learned about the long growl from The Birds of North America's account. Anyway I got a nice series of those growls before the bird flew across in front of me, confirming my identification. I actually had no doubt about what it was, but always like visual confirmation when possible. This guy sounded like a very sick cat. Getting that sound really made my day.

Lunch, napping, reading, and washing Toby consumed the rest of my day. We're going out to dinner at the local BBQ place. We tried to eat there Sunday, but they'd had so much business that they'd run out of meat and closed early. They were smoking more meat, though, and it really smelled good. That night we settled for \$10.00 hamburgers at a nearby place and they were awful--so dried up that both of us had trouble swallowing the meat. Furthermore they were served on hard rolls, not

the usual soft hamburger buns, and had skimpy amounts of the other items--caramelized onions and mushrooms for me, bacon & cheese for Jim. The fries were so-so.

3:45 p.m., Sunday, May 3, 2009

Buena Vista Aquatic Recreation Area, between Taft & Bakersfield

Not much of interest the last several days—until today—so I haven't gotten the computer out to write things up. Here's a summary:

Thursday, April 30, we drove the car 100 miles west from Kernville to the southwestern San Joaquin Valley. When we got here to the Buena Vista Recreation Area, we discovered there were only 5 sites left for the weekend, but when we looked at the map of vacancies, we found that one of them was only a couple away from the site we usually choose and actually nicer than it is. The reason the park was so full was that they were having a catfish-catching derby on Saturday.

This park is located on the shores of Lake Webb, with Lake Evans not far away. These lakes are all that is left of the old Buena Vista Lake, which is where the Kern River ends. Before most of its water was diverted for agriculture, this part of the valley was a vast wetland. The park where we're camped has lots of turf and large shade trees, but no shrubs, so the bird list is limited. But the birds that are here are abundant. Jim is attracting a wide variety of fairly ordinary species to his birdseed and Magic Meal (corn meal & bacon fat): Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird, House Sparrow, House Finch, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, American Robin, Eurasian Collared-Dove. Mourning Doves haven't come down yet, but are definitely around. Many birds are attracted to Magic Meal this time of year, but no other. We've discovered that robins feed the stuff to their nestlings, and perhaps the orioles are doing it, too. I've encouraged Jim to try to get me some more Brewer's Blackbird & Brown-headed Cowbird photos, because I'm tired of the ones I'm using for my introductory Birding Skills Workshop, but I think he's spending most of his time working on the Bullock's Orioles. We've seen a number of different looking individuals, bright & less bright adult males, two or three different first-year males, one or two different females. The first afternoon at 4:30 Jim announced he was hearing a Great Horned Owl. I told him it was probably just the Eurasian Collared-Dove, but after listening a while, I realized he was right. There was a Great Horned Owl calling off in the distance—along with the E C-Dove & Mourning Dove. I also heard all three hooting the next morning at 7:30. This time I tried to record the trio, but the owl had quit by the time I got set up.

As we were approaching our destination Thursday, the trailer brakes suddenly started grabbing terribly. Every time we came to a stop sign, we'd hear a shudder or a screech. We decided to continue on in and get a site, then decide what to do about it. After we got situated, I discovered that one of our roof vent covers had broken off. We were really disgusted about the brakes, for Jim had just had new ones installed before we left home, but the vent cover was old, and Jim said it really hadn't fit quite right from the beginning. After mulling the thing over all night when he should have been sleeping, trying to decide whether to take the brakes apart himself and find out if there was a defective part he could go get and replace or to take it to a repair shop, Jim decided on the latter. On Friday morning, May 1, he called an RV repair place listed in Trailer Life Guide for Bakersfield and made an appointment to bring it in on Monday morning.

He still had to do something about the vent cover. We thought it just involved reattaching it as it sometimes does. But it turned out that the lid itself had some holes in it and one piece of hardware (a screw with washer attached) was broken. He patched the lid with a piece of stiff, clear plastic wrap off something he'd bought, using his tried and true "shoe goo," aka "Goop" this time. Fortunately he'd just bought a new tube the other day. Meanwhile I took Toby for a long walk around the park

looking for birds. When I got back, I learned that Jim really could have used my help. He had to climb up and down off the roof several times on the too-short ladder. Climbing up was not a problem for him but getting down was, as he had to hang one foot down to the top of the shaky ladder and hope that it didn't tip over when he brought his other leg down. I could have handed him things so he didn't have to climb down and helped guide his feet to the top of the ladder when he finally did. I told him he should have called me on the radio to come back, but he didn't want to interrupt my birding. We've carried this six-foot ladder many times and he's used it before, but this time he said he really should have an eight-foot one instead.

He got the vent cover reattached, but warned me it would blow right off again if I opened the vent. Rain was forecast for Friday night, and we feared the cover might leak, too, right on our bed. We had 0.3 inch of rain, and the lid did not leak! The morning was clear, but light rain had started by mid-afternoon. We (rather, Jim) got the outdoor chairs out several times and then put them away. By evening it was raining steadily, but lightly, and did so for several hours.

The rain was supposed to continue into Saturday morning, May 2, but it didn't. However, we decided not to go too far. I'd had good success recording birds at the Tule Elk Reserve near here. No sooner had we gotten there than a birding group from Bakersfield arrived. They were going to go into the part of the preserve closed to the public, because one couple in the group does a monthly bird count there and had received permission to take the small party inside. However, they stood around on the public viewing platform a long time and talked, doing a little birding. Then someone spotted a shorebird in the little wet area not too far away. Since there had been a Wilson's Snipe there for quite a while recently, he thought it must be that. But when I looked at it, I realized it wasn't that. It was totally the wrong shape and color. The others agreed after looking at it, but none of them knew what it was. After pondering the problem briefly, I decided it wasn't anything common and had to be a Solitary Sandpiper. My ID was confirmed when it flew a few feet, showing its ladder-barred tail with the dark stripe down the middle. I checked a field guide to be sure, though. They all thanked me profusely for my help. Finally they went inside the gate and I thought I could then do some recording. But no, they just walked back and forth for a long time on the back side of that wetland, instead of driving off on the refuge road, still doing more talking than birding. Finally I gave up on recording for the day, and we left and came back to the trailer.

The birders had told me we really must go to the Kern National Wildlife Refuge. I had worried that the refuge road might be muddy, but they assured me that it was an all-weather road. I asked them if they knew where there was a large Tricolored Blackbird nesting colony and one man recalled that there was one on the northwest corner of Gun Club Rd. and Sherwood Ave. This location is only a little way southeast of the Kern NWR, so we decided to go there first this morning.

Today, Sunday, May 3, we got up at 5:00 and were out of the park by 6:30. It took us the better part of an hour to get to the Tricolored Blackbird spot, but we found it with no problem. It's actually a good sized wetland with lots of cattails. Tricolored Blackbirds were high profile from the start, flying in large groups back and forth between their nests and the field on the east side of Gun Club Rd. From the road we could also see large numbers of birds clinging to the cattail stalks, many of which were last year's dead ones. Jim discovered that we could walk down through a weedy ditch that wasn't too muddy and be on the dike road. This took us directly to the edge of the colony. I knew they were dense, but to see it up close was really a thrill. I recorded the birds a long time. There was some equipment noise from a plant a half-mile away, but after a while even that ceased. The nearby road had little traffic, just an occasional truck or piece of equipment going in and out of the dirt farm road. Jim said he got some nice shots of females and also some of males that weren't quite as

good. After a while I went back to the truck for my camera to get some overviews. By this time I had discovered the access road to the dike road and went out on that. That was when I discovered there was a No Trespassing sign on that access road. As I walked back to the truck, I also discovered small, unobtrusive No Trespassing signs on all the utility poles. We had been parked right between two poles and hadn't noticed them. I don't know who owns the property, but certainly the folks who had been going in and out of the field on the other side of the road saw us and no one had chased us away. Since Jim was still over by the colony, I decided I might as well finish my misdeed and go back and get the pictures I wanted. Anyone else wanting to go there to see the birds should probably not trespass as we did. You can see the birds well from the road, especially with a nice telescope. [When we got home, we discovered that both Jim's and my rolls of film were missing and all stubs were accounted for. I think we may have dropped the two rolls beside the road in our haste a few days later when we changed film.]

After we left the colony we continued on to the Kern NWR. The map showed the route to be a little shorter if we zig-zagged northeastward to Garces Ave., instead of going south to SR 46. It may have been shorter in distance, but not in time. Most of the roads before we got to Garces were in extremely poor condition with lots of stretches of broken pavement, potholes, etc.

The refuge is open from sunrise to sunset every day—except Wednesdays and Saturdays during hunting season. It's a square 4 miles x 4 miles, and there's a 6-mile tour road that samples it. The road was a little mushy in spots from the rain, but there's lots of gravel and we didn't have any trouble negotiating it. It's a beautiful refuge, with lots of water, cattails, drying ponds, etc. Among the birds I found and heard for my sounds list were Gadwall, Clark's Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Loggerhead Shrike, White-faced Ibis, and Black-crowned Night-Heron. (All were species covered in my just completed Learning More California Bird Sounds workshop, and I had challenged my students to try to hear them for a Great Sounds Search. They'll turn in their reports in August.) Other waterfowl included Ruddy Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Mallard, and Redhead. From their presence this time of year, I'd presume they were all nesting. It was a nice cool day, so I did a little walking along the road and got some recordings. This is really a nice place and one I'd love to return to. It's an outstanding place to record birds. The nearest road has almost no traffic. There are no industrial plants audible. Airplane traffic was very infrequent. TL (Trailer Life's guide to campgrounds) says there's a KOA only 15 miles away from there—beside I-5. We may stay there tomorrow night and go back first thing on Wednesday.

It was nearly noon when we left the refuge, so we stopped at an IHOP along I-5 (Stockdale Hwy. exit) on the way back to the trailer. Couldn't resist the "regular" breakfast: 2 eggs, hash browns, 2 bacons, AND a crepe filled & topped with cream cheese & strawberries. All delicious and only \$5.99. We couldn't believe it. Good service, too; Jim tipped him well. Just before we left three busloads of high school-aged kids from Orange Co. trooped in to eat. We were certainly glad we got there before they did.

Whenever we're camped in a birdy place, I always love to lie in bed in the morning and listen to the dawn chorus. It's always fun to find out which bird sounds off first. Since we didn't get up very early Friday and Saturday, I had a nice chance to do this at Buena Vista Recreation Area. Every day the early bird was the Western Kingbird. They started as early as 4:15 am. One day a Mourning Dove was second and another it was an American Robin.

For about 20 years I came up to this area and did Breeding Bird Survey routes for the US Fish & Wildlife Service on three consecutive mornings in early May. Each route is 25 miles long with three-minute stops every half-mile to count everything I could see and hear. I reluctantly gave them

up because we seemed always to be on some long trip elsewhere at this time, but this year we're right here again. All the birds we've seen and roads we've driven have brought back many memories of stops on those routes. After I married Jim and we got our trailer, we always stayed here at Buena Vista Lake. (Before that Mother and I stayed in a motel in Bakersfield.) I wonder if anyone is doing those routes nowadays.

10:45 a.m., Thursday, May 7, 2009

Redonda Vista Campground, South Shore, Lake San Antonio, a Monterey Co. park

Our trip to Bakersfield on Monday., May 4, to get the trailer fixed at Spiers RV wasn't totally satisfactory. The brakes didn't act up as we drove into town. The mechanic convinced Jim that he might just have the trailer brake controller adjusted wrong, and since they charge \$200 just to take things apart and look at them, the man just adjusted the controller differently. Jim drove around the nearly empty parking lot (not much RV business of any kind in this recession), braking hard repeatedly. Again they didn't act up. However, when we got on the road later in the day, they started grabbing again, but not as badly as before. I tried to talk Jim into finding a brake place in Paso Robles, but he thought the controller might still be incorrectly adjusted. (The controller adjusts the amount of braking by the trailer brakes relative to the truck brakes.)

We decided to get entirely new roof vents in the front and back, since the two individual parts that were broken cost almost as much. Pretty soon the woman who coordinates with the service manager who coordinates with the guy actually doing the work (as I understand it) came out and told us our front vent was inserted the wrong way so it opened to the front instead of to the rear. (The rear one was the correct way.) We explained that we knew that and wanted it that way. Way back in 1991, before we went to Alaska, someone suggested that having the front vent set to scoop air in and opened a little bit kept the dust from filling up the trailer when we drove on unpaved roads. We made the change and it worked like a charm, so we've kept it that way ever since for dirt roads. Unfortunately, Spiers RV installed both vents so they opened forward, and I didn't discover it until evening. Jim says he'll take it out and put it back in right when we get home. The new vents are really nice looking.

We didn't get away from Bakersfield until around 1:30 p.m. because they didn't want us to drive until the sealant around the edge of the vents had thoroughly set—and we agreed. I don't want rain on my side of the bed next time it rains! While we were waiting, we had lunch at an RV park half a mile north of the repair shop on Wible Rd. It has a very nice bar and grill and the lunch was first class.

We didn't feel like driving all the way to Paso Robles when we got such a late start. Besides, I thought maybe we could go back to the Kern NWR for a couple of hours early in the morning. I really wanted to get some nice sounds before the breeze got up. So we spent Monday night, May 4, at the Lost Hills RV Park just off I-5 at the Lost Hills exit. It's no longer a KOA, but we could still recognize its ancestry by the A-frame registration building. The place is sort of barren and run-down—little shade from the tired eucalyptus trees. Also there was a loud, low roar most of the night—from the businesses, trucks or nearby freeway (couldn't tell which, but it diminished before I went to bed).

Unfortunately, on Tuesday, May 5, there was a significant breeze (ca. 10 mph) that started before dawn. I saw no point in going back to Kern NWR under those conditions, so we just set off for Paso Robles. I bought groceries at a very nice market; Scoleri's I think it's called. It was much nicer than the awful Von's at Kernville and more like my favorite Stater Bros. at home. Produce was beautiful and prices were reasonable, too. Didn't need any meat.

From Paso Robles we drove north a ways, then cut off on some slow, narrow, winding, hilly roads for Lake San Antonio. We hadn't been here since Feb., 1988, when we came up on a Sea and

Sage Audubon field trip, which included a boat ride to see eagles. But for all these years we've remembered how much we liked the place. There was no one at the entry booth and we had to pay at the self-registration station, but didn't have to select a particular site. We had planned to stay at least five days, through Saturday night, but when I discovered that we could stay a week for only \$10 more than five days would cost, we decided to do it. Registration doesn't require that we specify a site. In fact, we could move to another site now, if we wished--just carry our registration card off the post with us.

South Shore has three camping units, with some sites reservable, some not (a wonderful plan, we think; wish the state parks would do that). We're in the Redonda Mesa one, same loop as last time. We found a really nice site, mostly shaded by blue oaks. The grassy understory has been mowed (fire protection, I'm sure), but there's some not too far away. Of course, the grasses are not native, just the usual foxtails, etc. To top it off, we have full hookups. The campsites on either side of us are short, unlevel and generally pretty scroungy, so I doubt they'll be very popular this weekend. There are lots of sites better than those free now. I really don't know how busy this place gets on weekends. We're glad we weren't here last weekend. They had a big triathlon then and are still cleaning up from the event.

For a day and a half Jim's feeding station was attracting just three species: Western Scrub-Jay, Oak Titmouse, and Acorn Woodpecker. The first two are incredibly bold and almost fly between our legs—certainly right past them. Before he can throw them, they steal the peanuts from the picnic table where Jim's sitting with his cameras. The titmice drop out of the trees like leaves, then disappear against the leaf litter. I'd forgotten how tiny they are. So far none of these birds has used the water drip and bird bath. They always fly over to the other side of the trailer and drink from the slight drip where the hose is attached to the water faucet.

We were seeing Yellow-billed Magpies off a ways, but it seemed they spent all their foraging time dumpster-diving. There was a lot of trash in them after last weekend's events. It wasn't until late yesterday afternoon that one became bold enough to come in and sample the birdseed and magic meal. But whenever Jim took a flash photo, the bird would jump three feet and often fly off. Now they're becoming less wary and coming in more often in small groups. I hope Jim is getting some nice shots. A black and white bird with iridescence is probably the hardest thing there is to photograph. And getting that long tail pleasingly placed in a photo adds to the difficulty.

Yesterday morning, Tuesday, May 6, we drove all around the South Shore area. There are two other camping units, both down a steep road by the lake. One has some full hook-up sites, but they are much smaller than ours and the roads around the loops are pretty tight. I'm glad we didn't try to haul the trailer down there sight-unseen. I really think it's nicer up where we are. Sites are more widely spaced, and there's no boating and other noise. Marina is right by the lakeside campground, along with resort cabins, a small store (mostly snacks and souvenirs, but a few groceries), etc. We drove the one-way road along the edge of the lake. It has lots of pull-outs where people can scramble down the slope and fish from the lakeshore. (I may walk it some morning.) This came out at the main road. We turned left and drove to the end, where there's a boatlaunch and another campground—not very attractive and no hookups. I guess it would attract boaters.

Before returning to the trailer we stopped by the visitors center and looked around their small museum. Very nice and worth a visit. Displays show what this valley was like before it was flooded for the reservoir. One small town, Pleyto, was completely flooded, as were several farms. There were interesting posters on birds, fish, and plants. I found the one on how to distinguish the three oaks in the park to be especially helpful. That's how I learned for sure that we're in a grove of Blue Oaks. They're deciduous and were bare last time we were here.

(I just looked out the window and saw a jay drinking out of the bird birdbath for the first time. Jim said they just started doing it and that a magpie did it a few minutes ago. Maybe the magpie taught the jay.)

While we were eating breakfast, a Wild Turkey came sauntering up toward Jim's feeding station. I had been hearing distant gobbling ever since we got here, so wasn't too surprised. Pretty soon there were three hens and two gobblers in sight. The gobblers spent a lot of time strutting around with their undertail coverts fanned and gobbled occasionally. They were just as tame as the rest of the birds around here. Jim followed them around and took a few photos. I recorded some gobbles out the window.

From the very start, the morning was slightly breezy, but despite that and my concern that the breeze would do nothing but get stronger as the morning progressed, I took a long walk with my tape recorder. There's a trail that circles the Redonda Mesa Campground—easy walking because it's designed for bikes. Most of the loops are closed to camping, so I had the entire walk to myself. Not too many birds were evident, but that's sometimes good because then I can get solos from those that are sounding off.

It wasn't until I got to the far end of the farthest camping loop (K) that things began to get interesting. I saw a swallow quickly flying up and down from the ground to a particular place in a large oak tree. It was a female and it took me quite a few looks to decide that it was a Violet-Green, not a Tree. At first I thought she was feeding young, but how could she find a food item every 10 seconds or so and make so many trips to and from the nest cavity? Then I saw her carry a long piece of straw. It turned out she was carrying nesting material to a tree cavity about 15 ft high. Once she had the straw held cross-ways in her bill, so she couldn't pop into the cavity. She kept barging against the opening, then backing off. Finally she entered. I couldn't see whether the straw broke or bent or she dropped it. She was getting her straw from an area where the weeds had been mowed.

I sat on a picnic bench a long time watching her and figuring out what she was doing. While I was doing this, I thought I felt a little scritch-scratch on my hat. When I heard a soft "tew tew tew" call, I realized that a Western Bluebird had landed on my head. After a few seconds, it fluttered off and I looked around and saw that it was a male. A female was around, too. I never did figure out where their nest cavity was, although I suspected one stump for a long time. I finally decided he was just using my head as a convenient post from which to survey for insects on the ground.

Temperature the past several days has ranged from a high in the 80s to a low in the 50s—comfortable outside, but the trailer gets a little warm in the mid-to-late afternoon sun, so we turn on the air-conditioner for a while each day. It's not too hot to sit outdoors in the shade with the nice breeze. I finally got my embroidery out yesterday and figured out where I left off on the project I started last summer. I worked on it several hours.

It's 12:15—time to quit and fix lunch.

10:30 a.m., Saturday, May 9, 2009 **Lake San Antonio**

I haven't done much the last couple of days, but should probably write it up before I forget. Yesterday morning I tried to record the birds around the site before the other campers got up, but the birds weren't nearly as noisy as they are later in the day. Especially, the jays and magpies hadn't gotten as feisty. Best sound was a White-breasted Nuthatch going on and on.

I've seen quite a few nuthatches in the treetops, but none has come down to our feeding station. I recall last time we were here, we had one (or more) feeding out of our hand. I took quite a few photos of Jim with them; he loves to feed birds and animals, including Toby.

Speaking of Toby, we've taught him to "sit" for food at the table, It only took a couple of days. He already knew "sit," sort of, if you pushed his rear down. Now he'll sometimes do it if you just wave a piece of food at him and stare at him. He still forgets and stands on his long hind-legs and sticks his nose & long tongue up on the table from time to time, though.

After breakfast I took a short walk along the trail next to the road toward the entrance station, trying to stay in the shade as much as possible. I saw a beautiful male deer with gorgeous velvety antlers. I tried to call Jim on the radio and tell him where I was, but he misunderstood my directions and by the time he got there the deer had wandered off into the woodland.

My best recording was right between the road and the campground, but fortunately things were still fairly quiet. A Yellow-billed Magpie was doing his entire repertoire from the top of a small oak, and I recorded him at length. At least, I think it was "him," based on the fact that for most passerines, males usually vocalize more than females.

While we were sitting outside in the afternoon a fledgling Western Scrub-Jay appeared at the birdbath, hopped in and took a really good bath. It was the first bird here that we've seen bathe, and few of them even drink because they're so used to the faucet drips. I had to yell at Jim to photograph it. He thought it was just a scruffy female. He'd even seen it begging to be fed, but again thought it was female begging for a courtship meal. Anyway, he got the message in time to get off a number of nice shots. I hope the bird will be back again. The inside of its mouth was bright pink, not yellow. I'd like to see if the corners of the mouth are the same pink.

There is not a particularly large influx of weekenders here. In fact, in our loop, three large units left and two came in yesterday. Unfortunately the new folks' kids were tearing around screaming until around 9:30 and the adults were up yakking loudly until at least midnight. That was when I put my earplugs in, so I don't know when they quit. At least, they're on the opposite side of the loop from us so their noise was not super-audible. The few words I did catch seemed to be of a fundamentalist Christian bent, with one man holding forth at length. If so, they need to reread the Golden Rule—or at least read the Quiet Hours rule at this campground.

I didn't try to do any recording this morning. Instead I filled Jim's weekly requisition for pancakes, then cleaned the trailer and defrosted the refrigerator, wrote a couple of emails, and am now doing this.

The temperature topped off at 87° yesterday, with 90° forecast for today and the next several. Lows are in the 50s, I'd guess, and it's only really hot from noon until around 5:00 pm--maybe longer today. We'll see.

11:00 a.m., Sunday, May 10, 2009

Lake San Antonio

It did get up to 90° yesterday, although King City topped out at 84°, when 90° had been predicted. But again it cooled off nicely at night. When we awoke this morning, the electricity was out, so we worried how we would fare if it didn't come back on by afternoon. But after we got back from our morning's activities, it was on. We really need the AC for about four hours. Even though we sit outside in the heat, it's nice to be able to take a break in the nice cool trailer. All other features (lights, stove, refrigerator, fans, etc.) work fine without external electricity. Our solar-powered batteries do the job.

I haven't mentioned the California Quail. They're wandering all around in the short grass, invariably in pairs. So far they've not come to our feeding station, but yesterday afternoon a pair came awfully close. The female always leads the way, we've noticed. The male follows behind, protecting her since she has to eat more than he does—or maybe seeing to it that no other male has his way with her. This time she came in from this side, then that side, always retreating before she

got quite here. This went on for 15-20 minutes, and each time she got closer. She'd peck at the ground where we knew there was birdseed, but we don't think she ever found any. Once she leaned over the top of the feeding log and looked inside, but took nary a bite. We thought the water drip might attract her, but she seemed leery of getting inside the triangle defined by the tripod (three sticks fastened together with a Bungee cord) legs from which the water bag is hanging. We sort of think the boisterous Western Scrub-Jays are intimidating the quail. Sometimes 5 to 8 jays feed calmly together, but then for no apparent reason one bird takes offense and chases another one off loudly, or else one additional bird comes in and does the same.

Out the window this morning we saw two juvenile jays, obviously siblings. Jim has nice photos, but will probably shoot more if he gets a chance this afternoon.

After breakfast I took Jim up to where the Violet-green Swallow had been building her nest a few days ago. The same activity was still going on, but now the male was in attendance. He did no work, but did sit on a prominent high snag and guard her. Jim set up his camera on a tripod and spent a couple of hours photographing the female coming and going from the nest. This required a lot of patience, for most of the time she just popped in and out in a split second. Only when she brought an especially large or long load of nesting material did it take a little bit of time for her to get inside; then Jim could pop off a shot or two. We also saw another pair, with both sexes making repeated trips in and out a broken-off treetop. It was much higher than the other one—too high for photos. [Unfortunately all of these photos were on the roll that got lost.]

While Jim was doing this, I walked maybe a third of a mile along a road/trail that headed out of the campground near the swallow nest. It went along the edge of a hill with chaparral on one side and blue oak woodland below and on the other side of a gully. Beautiful habitat. I got a few recordings of birds singing solos, including some strange Mourning Dove songs--hoarse, incomplete, or with added notes. I also recorded Dark-eyed Junco songs and aggressive calls between two males in aerial combat, Lesser Goldfinch song of one bird, etc. The trail came out at the overflow campground, a barren area with widely scattered oaks--not very attractive--so I turned around and moseyed back.

Jim was still working on the swallow nest, so I sat at a shady picnic table a little ways away and watched the action. From there I could see the tall half-dead oak from which the male swallow guarded his hard-working spouse. The trunk had several cavities in it. A pair of titmice were bringing in food to one of them from time to time. And so was a pair of starlings! At first I thought I had my holes mixed up and the starling was using one and the titmouse the other, but no, both pairs of birds were bringing food to the same hole. I stood right under the tree and recorded the calls of the juveniles. They called softly all the time, then more insistently when an adult came. I suppose they're starling chicks and the starlings just usurped the titmice's cavity, but there may be other explanations. I'll have to compare the juvenile sounds with recordings I have at home of starling (and possibly also titmouse) nests. There aren't a lot of starlings in this park. I've maybe seen as many as ten all told. The titmice are much more abundant. Everywhere I go they're right there, always audible, always visible, always close. I don't recall ever being in a place where they're so high-profile.

[When I got home, I discovered I had previously recorded starling and titmouse nestlings, each only once. These sounds matched the titmouse youngsters better, but that, of course, doesn't prove they were titmouse babies. Nestling birds' voices change dramatically as they mature, and I don't know how old any of the nestlings I've recorded were. Maybe the hollow tree was an "apartment house," with both species entering via the same hole. Or . . .? The Birds of North America doesn't say anything about either species feeding young of another species.]

8:45 p.m., Monday, May 11, 2009
Lake San Antonio

This morning, with almost all the weekend campers gone, I decided to walk down the steep road from our campground to the lake, where there is a marina, store, cabins, etc. I thought maybe I'd find different birds on the steep hillsides and next to the water, but I didn't really find much. In fact the birds were pretty scarce and quiet. I did get a few recordings of the Western Grebes, which were in moderate-sized aggregates here and there. Their calls weren't very frequent and all that I got will be marred with House Finch and Mourning Dove calls and with the sounds of water lapping on shore and slapping onto the boats that are moored out in the lake. There was no breeze when I started out at 7:30, but it had gotten up by the time I got down to the lake at 8:30. Jim came down then with the truck and leap-frogged me along the stretch of one-way road between the marina area and a day-use picnic ground and swimming beach. I didn't want to walk back up the hill, and the one-way road is a bit hard to find—didn't want him not to find it! The road is a pretty walk, and we encountered no other vehicles. But the birds were just as scarce and mundane as before. Finally, when I got to the picnic area after walking 2-3 miles, I dropped down onto the picnic table bench closest to the lake and just took in the beautiful scene—across the blue water at the golden hills with their scattered blue oaks. The oaks are more scattered on that side than on ours, because it's a south-facing slope and ours is north-facing. [I took photos, but they were on one of the lost rolls.]

As soon as I sat down, I noticed a Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon form) on the ground at my feet. A second look showed me he had a mouth full of bugs. A third look revealed a female, too. Mouthfuls of bugs mean only one thing: a nest. So I watched him wander out into the low weeds in front of me and disappear. Then he popped out and flew off. Pretty soon the female did the same thing. After several minutes, it was obvious that they always popped out from exactly the same place, even though they usually meandered in. I called Jim on the radio and he came down and watched them, too. When we'd figured out where the nest had to be, he walked down and took a look. He couldn't see it from any angle, but he did discover sort of a tunnel with vegetation on top of it and guessed that to be their entrance. Of course, he couldn't have photographed the nest without messing it up completely, so we just left it alone.

I found the calls of the adults interesting, having just taught a workshop that had lots of junco sounds in it. Before Jim went down and looked at the nest site, the birds were giving a very high, almost inaudible "tik" call, which I interpreted to be a contact call to each other. After Jim had been down and come back, the call changed to a lower-pitched and louder "tik," most likely an alarm call. This helped me understand the purpose of the two calls I put on my Learning More California Bird Sounds CD.

After that experience, we came back to the trailer and I decided to try to find an unequivocal titmouse nest, so I took a chair up the slope a little distance to where they always seem to head after visiting our site. I sat in a number of different places, watching carefully for signs of carrying food or visiting cavities, but saw nothing.

Yesterday afternoon the female quail finally screwed up her courage and drank a bit more water. Then today, our last day here, they came in and, after dawdling around a long time, they both drank several times. While the male was waiting for his mate to drink, he started pecking at the ground, and discovered birdseed! Then she got the idea and they both pecked around for maybe ten minutes before ambling off.

The juvenile scrub-jay count is now up to three. While we were eating lunch today, three identical-looking birds were taking turns bathing in the birdbath. Then in the late afternoon, one or two adults started bathing, too. They apparently got the idea from the youngsters. I think they

thought the bath was too small, for when the first adult got in, it just flapped tentatively, of course not hitting any water. But then it crouched down and got its breast feathers all wet. That must have felt good, for it stayed in that position for maybe 15-20 seconds. Then it flew over to Jim's table and mooched a peanut out of his hand, the first one to do that, too. We almost hate to leave, but Jim put his camera gear away around 4:30 and announced that he couldn't think of any other way to shoot these birds. Unfortunately the quail visit took place after that and a photo of the two of them side-by-side behind the birdbath would have been cute.

Yesterday the high temperature was 92° (our hottest day here), with almost no wind in the late afternoon and evening. It didn't cool off very fast either, but was nice and cool by morning. Today's high was only 87°, and a nice breeze got up in the late afternoon, and it has cooled off nicely now.

4:15 p.m., Tuesday, May 12, 2009 **San Lorenzo County (Monterey) Park, King City, CA**

This morning there were hardly any RVs left in the campground and no wind. So I was finally able to do what I'd been wanting to do since we got to Lake San Antonio, record birds in our campsite. I sat outside for about 1 1/2 hours before breakfast and an hour afterwards, with my tape recording sounds most of the time. I got all sorts of sounds from the birds that came to our feeding station, including some aggressive sounds that I didn't have before. I got several nice examples of the purring rattle of the Western Scrub-Jay. Before, I only had the single example that I put on the Learning California Bird Sounds CD. I must look up the function of it when I get home, but seem to recall it's a female sound. [Correct.] It often, but not always, occurred right after a loud, aggressive "scree-scree-scree..." during a chase, but from a different bird. (The count of jays present all at the same time finally topped out at 12 this morning. No wonder they didn't always get along.) Up to five Yellow-billed Magpies came a few times and I got a long sequence of a variety of sounds, both loud and soft, from them. They seemed to be the same types of notes I heard from the one I got a few days ago and have been hearing in the afternoons when I sat outside. I don't think it's a random repertoire, but rather just the assortment of sounds typical of these magpies. I wonder what the function of each one is. Acorn Woodpeckers occasionally chased the magpies away from the Magic Meal, sounding off loudly as they did so. Only once in all the days we've been here, with Acorn Woodpeckers right outside all the time, have I heard anything that remotely resembles the "braying" sound that's on the Peterson recording, and this was just one simple little downslurred "bray." I wish I knew when it's used and for what purpose, but I certainly didn't learn that here.

Finally around 10:00, I called it quits, went inside and bathed Toby, since I wasn't sure if we'd have a sewer hookup again very soon. Then we hooked up and drove 45 miles to King City, where we found a site for two nights in this county park campground. It's quite nice and the sites are shady, but pull-thrus and rather close together. The group of sites where we are have "reserved" signs on them for Thursday through Sunday, but since we want to stay only Tues. & Wed., we took one. This will probably mean we don't get neighbors. I discovered the Salinas Valley fair is this coming weekend, which may account for the popularity of the campground.

Temperature here in the Salinas Valley is cooler than it was at Lake San Antonio. Although it's the hottest town in the valley, there are no hills blocking the sea breeze. High was forecast to be 78° today here. Low last night was 48°, which made it pretty chilly sitting outside recording those birds first thing this morning.

We're here for two nights and are going to Pinnacles National Monument tomorrow. Our reservations in Morro Bay start Thursday, so this seemed like an interesting way to spend a couple of days.

5:15 p.m., Sunday, May 17, 2009
Morro Bay State Park, Morro Bay

Wow! It's been five days since I updated this log.

On Wed., May 13, we drove to Pinnacles National Monument, as planned. Although it's only 25 miles away, the road is pretty narrow, curvy, and bumpy in places, so it took the better part of an hour to get there. We elected to go to the east side, because it's considered more birdy. The approach is through a narrow valley with beautiful riparian woodland along a stream. This continues into the monument itself.

I had seen conflicting reports of the campground situation there. Trailer Life Guide and AAA didn't say a word about a campground, but a book I bought at AAA that was not published by them did mention one. It's called West Coast RV Camping by Tom Stienstra. It's in the Moon Outdoors series published by Avalon Travel Publishing, 2007. It has extensive descriptions of each place & I've used the book several times. However, I discovered that some of the site locations are grossly misplaced on the maps, so I wasn't sure if I trusted the book. I did notice that the maps were prepared by the publisher, not the author of the book. Anyway, when we got there, we discovered that Stienstra was accurate about the campground. There is a small one with electrical hookups. The sites are extremely close together, though, and only a couple of them are shady. We might patronize one on some other trip, but not this one. We had reservations at Morro Bay for a week starting Thursday, and after that we have to go someplace that doesn't take reservations. The Pinnacles campground does and is sure to be full on the Memorial Day weekend. I have my eye on a couple of USFS campgrounds on the coast between San Simeon and Big Sur.

We drove to the end of each of the short park roads, from which we could get glimpses of the tops of a few pinnacles, which are the remains of volcanic throats. I tried walking one of the short trails through the riparian woodland. I heard lots of Cassin's Vireos, which I tried to record, but unfortunately this park is extremely popular with hikers and rock-climbers, and there was a succession of groups of noisy teenagers tramping by, with their lips flapping as fast as they could go. At no time was there any quiet time. And we were there on a weekday before most schools are out! What must the place be like on a weekend in summer?

Thursday morning I did a week's grocery shopping in King City and repackaged the meat and bread and figured out how to get it all in the trailer's refrigerator. All this took a long time. We ate an early lunch, then drove the 85 miles to Morro Bay, stopping in Paso Robles for a few groceries I had forgotten and to visit the post office to pick up our absentee ballots, which my niece had mailed.

Along the road from Atascadero to Morro Bay (SR 41), we stopped to check out another USFS campground, Cerro Alto, which is listed on the AAA camping map. It said it had sites for 30-foot rigs. When we turned onto the 0.9-mile access road to the campground, we wondered what we had gotten ourselves in for. It was extremely narrow with almost no turnouts. We did meet a couple of trucks, but fortunately nothing towing a trailer. It really would have been a struggle for two long rigs to meet on that road. When we got to the campsites, we found that there were several that were long enough. The area is beautiful—deeply forested, Olive-sided Flycatchers singing, etc. It would be fun to walk that road recording birds. However, we both agreed, we never want to drive that road again! Fortunately we met no vehicles on the way out. I noticed that Stienstra didn't mention it in his book as a good place for RVs, although we saw a few there.

We had been unable to secure a site with electricity over the weekend, so were assigned a site in the barren back part of the Morro Bay State Park campground. Several years ago, they cleared out a lot of trees and shrubs and increased the capacity of the campground. Most of the "dry" sites are very short and designed for tent-campers, but here and there are some fairly long ones. We found

ourselves in an open area surrounded by tents—and some sites had several tents in them. Most of the campers were considerate of quiet hours—until this morning (Sunday), when the group next to us got up well before dawn and proceeded to break up camp right outside our bedroom window. As soon as they had left, the next group over did the same thing. I lay there and dozed between noisy spells, but Jim with his hearing loss slept through it all.

The site wasn't too bad for birds. Of particular interest was a female or first-year male (indistinguishable) Purple Finch, which came down from time to time to Jim's birdseed. Mostly what we got, though, were Brewer's Blackbirds.

On Thursday night we ate at the Galley Restaurant on the Embarcadero. I remembered enjoying it in years past. We discovered it had changed hands and become much more upscale (and pricey). Also, the menu is quite limited with just as many non-seafood items as seafood. I finally settled on one of the specialties of the evening, salmon imported from Scotland (on the coast of California!!). It was very good and cooked perfectly, so no complaints in that department. Jim settled for fish and chips (cod) and said it was so-so.

Monday and Tuesday a group of students from my recent Learning More California Bird Sounds workshop are scheduled to come up here for a field trip. Sally Menzel was scheduled to lead it, but I got an email from Roy Poucher commenting that he had heard the trip was cancelled because Sally's adult son had had major surgery and she had to stay home to take care of him when he got out of the hospital. I was puzzled that Sally hadn't emailed me about it, so immediately emailed her. She replied that she had, but had only used our home email address, not the Pocketmail one that I had told the class to be sure to use. Anyway, it turned out she had not cancelled the trip, just turned it over to me. I had told her I'd be happy to serve as a backup if she needed me. I am expecting a group of 6-8 people.

I had three days to scout for a two-day field trip, so could do it in a leisurely fashion, recording birds wherever I went.

On Friday, May 15, we drove south to Montaña de Oro State Park. I especially wanted to walk the coastal bluff trail, but when we got there we found it was totally socked in with fog—couldn't even see the water from the bluff-top. However, the fog almost ended at the road and the campground was only foggy at the more coastal end. I had also wanted to check that, so spent several hours enjoying the birds there. Especially interesting for the group that is to come were singing Wilson's Warblers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, and Purple Finches, for these are birds we covered in the class just completed. My list totalled 29 species seen or heard.

On Saturday, May 16, we returned to Montaña de Oro. This time the fog bank was a mile or so out to sea and the morning was gorgeous. We were interested in the appearance of the fog bank with the morning sun reflecting off of it. It was much brighter where the sun reflected directly back to our eyes, and grayer to the left and right. I especially wanted to find nesting Pigeon Guillemots. There were a lot of the birds on the water and loafing on the rocks right next to it. I did see a couple fly up and check out cavities, but no real signs of nesting. Certainly they weren't bringing fish to chicks in the nests. I got no sounds from them. If their sounds are anything like those of the closely related Black Guillemot of the Atlantic, they're pretty soft and confined to the nesting period. (I have recordings from Newfoundland of those high sounds.) Anyway, it was fun to see the birds. I didn't find any nesting Pelagic Cormorants either, but saw them flying around.

After walking the short loop trail (there's a longer one), recording Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrows and American Goldfinches mostly, we drove back to Los Osos and the Sweet Springs Sanctuary, owned by Morro Coast Audubon Society. I remembered it to be a good place for Chestnut-backed Chickadees, and I finally found a couple, but they certainly weren't high-profile. I did

find a juvenile Dark-eyed Junco being fed by its parents, but by the time Jim got there with his camera, it had disappeared under a bush.

This morning, Sunday, May 17, we went first to the heron and cormorant rookery not far from the campground. It was very active. Most of the noise came from Double-crested Cormorants; there must have been 100 nests. I hadn't realized they made so many different sounds and kept wondering if all those sounds I was hearing were really cormorants. It wasn't until I listened to Stokes Western Bird Sounds this afternoon, that I found out that they really were. Using Stokes I identified four different adult sounds plus some high whistles, which were probably juveniles by analogy with other cormorants on the tape. The cormorant nests here didn't seem to have chicks yet. I also found several Great Blue Heron nests and recorded adult and juvenile sounds from them. There were also a few Great Egret nests with well-grown chicks, but I heard nothing I could confidently say came from them. They were in the midst of the noisy cormorants.

After that we went to Morro Rock (an enormous ancient volcanic throat). There I found some Pelagic Cormorants on nests on the north-facing side. Then I went around to the other side--the end of the road--and found two photographers with long lenses aimed at the rock, so knew they were photographing the Peregrine Falcons. I approached one of them for information, but soon found out I had selected the wrong man. He was pretty glum and monosyllabic with his answers. So I thanked him and went to the other man, who was much friendlier and showed me where on the rock a fledgling was perched. It was in the shade under a ledge and sort of hard to make out, but when a tiny bit of fog came in, it was easier, because it reduced the hard shadows and the sun could reflect off of the fog droplets and illuminate the perched bird. It was too high for Jim to want to photograph, although I think he did snap a few, just to please me. We watched the youngster for a long time, chatting with the photographer and with a couple of eager novice birders who came by. Several times we saw adults flying back and forth around the top of the rock, but they never came in with food for Junior.

After a long time the juvenile took flight, flew a long ways along the rock and almost disappeared, then doubled back. Instead of returning to its original perch, it selected a spot behind a shrub, which unfortunately contained a Western Gull nest! The adult gull was anything but happy about new arrival and attacked the Peregrine over and over. It was hard to see exactly what was going on because the bush was in the way, but ultimately the juvie emerged from underneath(!) the shrub and disappeared behind the shrub just below it. After a long time there, it climbed up and disappeared into the bottom of the shrub with the gull nest. We wanted to see if it would ever come out and fly again, but finally got tired waiting and left. We hoped it wasn't permanently injured.

Our final stop of the morning was the Elfin Forest trail in Los Osos. I just wanted to check it out quickly to be sure it was as it had been last time. It was. Not too many species were evident at noontime, but I did get an interesting Spotted Towhee song—a very slow, loose trill.

We had to get back to the trailer around noon to move from the spot we were in to the hook-up site we'd reserved for the next four days. Our new site is #20 and at the end of the row. Jim isn't too happy with it, for it has shrubs only on one side, and he has to set up his feeding and watering station where we can't see the action from the dinette side of the trailer. Already, he has photographed adult and juvenile Nuttall's (subspecies) White-crowned Sparrows (the juvenile a first). We're seeing junco action nearby, so maybe he'll get a juvenile junco, too. Chestnut-backed Chickadees are in the Monterey Cypress right outside our dinette window. So we think this site will turn out to be just fine.

Our site has a clear view of where people check into the campground. Our reservation confirmation form that we received in the mail said clearly that no one could check in before 3:00 p.m., and we had made sure we didn't get here before that when we arrived last Thursday. It turned out to be absolutely untrue. People have been arriving steadily and being checked in all afternoon,

starting as early as 12:30 and probably before that. With check-out time at noon, there's really no reason for the delay. They don't have to change the beds and clean the bathrooms as in a motel.

9:15 p.m., Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Morro Bay State Park

Monday and Tuesday were busy days spent with the five class members and one guest (spouse of one). Three of the five were people who had just done my introductory visual workshop in the fall, but had done enough aural birding previously that I encouraged them to do this more advanced workshop. They needed just as much practice with the introductory sounds workshop birds as they did with the more advanced one we'd just finished. I felt the trips went very well and most of the birds we heard performed repeatedly so the group could really learn their sounds. I was able to refind all the birds I had discovered when I scouted the previous three days. I agreed with Sally as to the best birding places for a two-day trip, although I may have juggled them a bit.

We met Monday morning, May 18, at Morro Rock, where we especially enjoyed looking at the Pelagic Cormorants on their nest ledges on the north side of the rock and the adult Peregrine Falcon perched and flying around on the south side; no sign of the juvenile. With his scope, Tom Eastman discovered a Harlequin Duck male in the same area as the Pelagic Cormorants. That bird was a lifer for Tom and everyone else in the group except me. Unfortunately we heard no sounds from any of the preceding birds, but we certainly heard the sounds of the Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrows, which were sometimes so close it seemed we had to be careful not to step on them. They didn't sing from the ground, but from nearby on rocks and fences. Their song is different from the typical Gambel's that winters in southern California--and all over the west, including here. They also look different. There were many juveniles with their streaky breasts and dull head stripes, too. Out on the water we saw Common Loons (basic plumage), a Surf Scoter and a few Western Grebes. A Spotted Sandpiper was also present. With a little help from me the group identified the song of a Bewick's Wren.

After about 1.5 hour there, we spent an hour at the heron rookery in Morro Bay State Park between the Inn at Morro Bay and the Natural History Museum. It's really more of a Double-crested Cormorant rookery, but we also saw the Great Egret and Great Blue Heron nests with well-grown chicks that I had spotted when scouting. Someone spotted an adult Black-crowned Night-Heron, but not on a nest. In the trees overhead we heard a Hooded Oriole and a Western Tanager, seeing only the former.

We finished up the morning by walking around the spit on the south side of the marina. A surprise was a large number of Black Brants. They should have left a month ago. We also saw the Willets I found when I scouted. Another Bewick's Wren provided more practice on that bird's difficult song.

After a lunch at the Bayside Cafe right next to the marina, we broke for an afternoon nap, then finished up the day walking the 0.8 mile loop around the Elfin Forest in Los Osos. Not a large number of species, but we heard several different versions of the Spotted Towhee song, a California Thrasher or two, and even distant Marsh Wrens and a male Gadwall.

Tuesday morning, May 19, we spent at Montaña de Oro State Park. First we walked the length of the campground, which runs along above Islay Creek with its nice willow riparian area. Aural highlights were Purple Finch, Wilson's and Orange-crowned warblers, Swainson's Thrush (call first, which we had studied, then the song, which we had not), Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Lesser and American goldfinches. A female Hermit Warbler was glimpsed in the treetops, but she had nothing to say.

After that we walked out along the bluff. We had intended to take the 3/4 mile loop, but became so fascinated by the Pigeon Guillemots that we just stood there for the better part of half an hour. I was able to get some recordings of their high, thin whistles, sometimes extended and sometimes intermittent. Black Oystercatchers flew by occasionally and demonstrated their complete repertoire of calls.

After a picnic lunch, we went to the Sweet Springs Preserve, but didn't spend very much time there, for a large school group was wandering all over the place and the birds had pretty much fled for cover.

After an early afternoon break, we assembled in our campsite at 4:30 and watched the birds there for an hour. One couple had a lot of chairs that they "store" in the back of their Suburban. Those chairs plus our two allowed everyone to have a seat. This hour was a highlight of the trip, for they were able to get extremely close looks at Chestnut-backed Chickadees, adult and juvenile White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, and male and female Purple Finches. The female Purple Finch was the first bird to arrive when the group was seated, but we had to wait a long time for the male to show up, but his gorgeous purplish red plumage and other marks really impressed the group. That bird was a lifer for several people.

The tour finished up with a nice dinner at Dorn's Restaurant. Sally had recommended both places where we ate together, and we completed our meal at Dorn's with a toast (water glasses) to our absent leader.

This morning we did a lot of chatting with the members of the tour group who were staying in the campground (Tom Eastman, Ralph & Debbie Sugg), then late in the morning Jim and I went out to Montaña de Oro SP, where I got more sound and Jim got some pictures of the Pigeon Guillemots. I think I did better on the sound, for the birds were closer, although the surf was louder than it was yesterday. Jim's photos should be pretty good, although the sun wasn't quite on the birds as well as we might have liked. [Photos and sounds were both quite nice. I found I could almost completely eliminate the surf frequencies with Raven Lite, because the guillemot sounds were so high.]

After a 1:00 lunch at a forgettable Mexican cafe in Los Osos, we came back to the trailer and relaxed the rest of the day. (I should have been writing this then, but I forgot and worked on my embroidery instead. It's 10:00 now, almost bed time.)

5:30 p.m., Friday, May 22, 2009

Laguna Seca Recreation Area, east of Monterey (Monterey Co. park)

Yesterday our plan was to drive about 60 miles north on SR 1 and camp for the Memorial Day weekend at one of two US Forest Service campgrounds that the books said don't take reservations. So we sort of fooled around in the morning. Jim sat outside and photographed the birds in our site some more and I took Toby for a long walk. By the time we were hooked up, holding tanks dumped, propane purchased, and heading north, it was almost 11:00.

We stopped at the Elephant Seal viewing place near San Simeon and photographed the molting females and their well-grown young, which were sprawled all over the beach. No males are present at this time of year, the sign said. January is the most exciting time to be here when the newborn pups are out and the beachmasters are controlling their harems of females and jousting with one another. We've been there then. I fixed lunch there and we ate in the trailer, which fortunately was upwind from the odoriferous seals.

When we got back on the road, it soon narrowed and started on its famous curves and grades with grand views of the seascape. It was a trifle foggy, but we could still see the scenery well. We were so anxious about getting a campsite, that we didn't really enjoy the scenery very much. And Jim

didn't enjoy driving it at all. The trailer brakes started grabbing again; we've decided they mainly do it when they're hot, which was why the place in Bakersfield couldn't find anything wrong with them.

When we finally got to the first of the two USFS campgrounds and drove around in it, we found that most of the sites were occupied, and the remaining sites were reserved or else available for only one night because they were reserved the following nights. Taking reservations must be a very recent development.

There was nothing left for us to do but drive the rest of that long, winding road. I spent most of the time poring over the books trying to figure out where we might stay. I figured all the coastal state parks and commercial RV parks would be equally packed, so I started looking for something away from the coast a bit. I discovered the campground in connection with the Laguna Seca stockcar raceway. It's about seven miles east of US 1 on the road to Salinas. My brother used to race cars and had told me that the campground looked pretty nice, although he never camped there—or anywhere else, for that matter. So we decided to check that out and hope it wasn't full, too. The book listed nothing for Salinas, but I did find a couple of dismal-sounding places listed for San Juan Bautista.

We were overjoyed to discover that there were lots of spacious sites available at Laguna Seca and found a nice one. We're in an oak savannah habitat. The race track is over the top of a little hill and way down below. Jim went over to the top of the hill a little while ago and reported that cars were roaring around the track, apparently practicing, but we can't hear them at all in our site. It's 6:00 p.m. and so far there is no other RV within our view here. The site right next to us is reserved for the weekend, though, so I suppose the people will arrive late this evening. The campground is very hilly, so if an RV does arrive, we'll be able to look right over the top of it at the hills.

This is ever so much better than those USFS campgrounds would have been, for now we're close to the Monterey Peninsula. Furthermore, we have EW hookups; those USFS campgrounds only had water faucets here and there. The temperature, which can get pretty hot through here, is very cool. Last night it got down to 48° and the high was probably no higher than 60° during the several hours when we had sun. Most of the time it's been overcast. It's a Monterey County park, just as Lake San Antonio and San Lorenzo were. Monterey County has just three camping parks and now we've been in all of them. So far our feeding station has attracted Oak Titmouse, California Quail, House Finch, and Western Scrub-Jay. Wrentits are audible in the shrubs behind the trailer. Not too exciting, but better than a commercial RV park in San Juan Bautista--or even Carmel.

This morning there was a heavy marine layer, but no visibility problems. We headed for my favorite place in this entire area, the rocky Pacific Grove shoreline from Lover's Point to the Asilomar beach. (For 20-30 years I came here every summer to a California Association of Chemistry Teachers conference at Asilomar Conference Grounds.) I thought we should do it on Friday before the weekenders arrived. I walked a good bit of it, while Jim drove. There's parking everywhere along the route and beautiful scenery and birds around every bend. This time of year, of course, the birds are fewest because the wintering shorebirds aren't here. We only saw the ones that stay around, Killdeer and Black Oystercatcher. Jim photographed the Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants that were resting in the rocks very close to shore. They're in full breeding colors this time of year, and we don't have any very good pictures of them that way. I hope he was able to improve on them, but the light was really tricky. It was overcast the entire morning, and he was trying to get black subjects against water that kept changing from dark to white with the waves.

A little farther along I spotted three Brants in a little cove. The surf was breaking a little farther out and they were feeding in the calm water near shore. Because this area is so popular with people, the birds paid no attention when Jim went down to the edge of the water and photographed them full-

frame. They were the highlight of the day for him. [Unfortunately the pictures turned out overexposed. Apparently he still had his camera adjusted for the cormorant shots.]

We looked for the little coffee shop in Pacific Grove where I used to eat occasionally, but it was no longer there, so we came back to the trailer for a late lunch. We were pleased to find a Trader Joe's had gone in along the way, so Jim could restock his supply of favorite snacks. (He's been eating more of his stash than he planned and was running out.)

We're really glad those USFS campgrounds were full. This is so much better.

5:00 p.m., Sunday, May 24, 2009

Laguna Seca Recreation Area

Saturday morning we knew the Memorial Day holiday crowds would be out, but we went to Pt. Lobos State Reserve anyway, arriving around 9:00. I've been there many times before, mainly in August when I was staying at Asilomar, so it brought back old memories. I always love walking out to the small grove of Monterey Cypresses on the Point Lobos. The brochure said that it is one of only two original groves in the world. The other is across the bay on Cypress Point on the 17-Mile Drive. It's not a very big grove, but in the heart of it we encountered several extremely tame Mule Deer, which paid no attention to our presence. Chestnut-backed Chickadees were singing their raspy excuses for song. Enroute through the coastal scrub habitat were many blooming wildflowers. There was a new book available at the concession stand at the start of the walk, but it covered only Pt. Lobos, so I decided not to spend the \$22.00, but wish now that I'd bought it, for I'll probably see more of the same species farther north. I only have an old book on shoreline wildflowers of the Pacific coast.

After exploring the point trail, which we pretty much had to ourselves that early, we drove to the other end of the refuge road because I wanted Jim to get pictures of the nesting Brandt's Cormorants on Bird Island. I remembered seeing the large, fairly flat-topped, offshore rock dotted with the black forms. But when we got there, we found they no longer were nesting there. We had seen a small colony on a rock off Pt. Lobos. Unfortunately, when we doubled back there, the parking lot was full, but we found a parking place in another small roadside lot not too far away and Jim walked back and photographed the colony. I hope we'll find a better one farther north, but Jim said he thinks he got a nice full-frame image.

Meanwhile, I walked along the shoreline trail, imagining the rocks covered with turnstones, Surfbirds, Whimbrels, etc., and hoping they're having a successful nesting season in the Arctic. Instead of shorebirds, the rocks were swarming with people testing their skill in clambering across uneven terrain. At one place where there were no people, two Black-crowned Night-Herons were quietly resting or fishing. One of them was in a particularly attractive setting. I radioed Jim to drive to the nearest parking spot and get it, but just as he was setting out from the truck with his camera, some people decided to walk down there and the birds flew off. Oh, well, we have lots of nice BCNH photos.

All in all, it was a pleasant, but not particularly exciting morning. I like to have places to myself, but this is a holiday weekend.

Today was even less exciting. We drove into Seaside and did the laundry at a nice clean laundromat that was advertised on the back side of the campground map.

Weather the last two days has been pretty dismal. It starts out with drizzly fog and a temperature of about 48°. After a while the drizzle stops and the temperature rises to a high in the mid 50s. I think we saw the sun for ten minutes yesterday and not at all today. Forecast is for a bit more sun the next few days.

This afternoon Jim photographed the House Finches that are eating birdseed outside the trailer. I wanted their pictures because several of them have lots of red on their backs. Many people think that means they're Purple Finches, and I can use these photos to explain why they're not. At first he tried sitting outside in a chair, but the birds simply wouldn't come in. Besides, it was awfully cold sitting there with a stiff breeze adding to the chill of the mid-50s temperature. So he decided to photograph them out the trailer window by removing the dinette table and setting up his tripod there. It worked pretty well. [Photos were fine.]

Tomorrow is the last day of the holiday weekend, so we can move on. We hope there won't be too much traffic in the morning as we drive through the San Francisco Bay area and seek a campsite in Marin County not far from Pt. Reyes.

8:15 p.m., Wednesday, May 27, 2009 Westside Campground, Bodega Bay

Monday, Memorial Day, we drove from Laguna Seca to Samuel P. Taylor State Park in Marin County, via the freeways through Oakland and Berkeley and the Richmond-San Rafael bridge. The traffic wasn't too bad, but still it was hectic maneuvering through unfamiliar interchanges. When we got off the bridge, we followed Sir Francis Drake Blvd. all the way to the campground, stopping for a satisfactory, but not exceptional, lunch of Chinese takeout in a shopping center. The drive from then on was very slow, with extremely narrow, bumpy roads.

Samuel Taylor State Park is in the redwoods. We thought we were selecting a site that would get sun part of the day for our solar panels, but I misjudged the compass directions. Usually I have a good idea of where north is, but I was wrong this time. Jim never knows, for he lets me do the navigating and gets turned around. But we figured our batteries were new and fully charged, so should be good for at least a couple of days.

We sat outside the rest of the day, enjoying the first warm, sunny weather we'd had since we left Lake San Antonio. In fact, we hadn't seen the sun for more than a few minutes each day while we were in the Monterey area. Fog had been the rule. Cold fog, too, with highs in the mid-50s and lows in the 40s. We actually had highs in the upper 70s both days we were at Taylor SP.

The most interesting birds at Jim's feeding operation were some Steller's Jays. They're incredibly dark, with almost no blue eyebrow. I seem to recall that there's a different subspecies in a small area in this part of the range. I'll have to look it up when we get home. [I was right. It's carbonacea and ranges from Marin and Contra Costa counties south to Monterey Co.] Anyway, I commissioned Jim to do a good job photographing them. [He did.] The second afternoon, a Russet-backed Swainson's Thrush flew in and lit on a fence post only six feet from my face, then hopped down to the ground and foraged a while longer even closer. I really want Jim to improve on his photos of this subspecies, but it was not to be. The bird got chased off by another pair of them, then neither pair came back. I often heard their songs and calls well down the slope toward the nearby creek. Other interesting birds in our campsite included Pacific-slope and Olive-sided Flycatchers and, not far away, a Winter Wren. Jim was really happy to get a series of shots of a male Dark-eyed Junco feeding one of his recently fledged chicks.

The campground was beautiful, but not far from the highway. We couldn't see much of the traffic, but we could surely hear it. The pavement is concrete, with badly patched seams between the sections, not to mention potholes in the asphalt where they'd done crude job of widening the road a trifle. (It was still awfully narrow.) Marin County roads are terrible! I guess those wealthy residents don't want to pay any taxes to fix the county roads. Monday night there was a steady stream of cars returning inland from their weekend on the coast.

Yesterday morning, Tuesday, May 26, we explored Pt. Reyes National Seashore. Our campground was only six miles from Hwy. 1, and the visitors center was one mile farther. It wasn't open yet when we got there, so we walked one of the nature trails, the Woodpecker Trail. It went through prairie, dry Mixed Evergreen woodland, and riparian woodland, all in a rather short walk. I recorded a nice Winter Wren song, plus other species.

On the Woodpecker Trail I recorded the texts of some of the signs and transcribed them when I got home:

The Mixed Evergreen Forest is characteristic of California, a place of great diversity and change where almost anything is possible. Climate, land forms and soils are extremely varied and new conditions are constantly arising. The plant communities respond; forest may edge into chaparral, only to pass into grassland. A crazy-quilt-like pattern emerges, blanketing the land in bold mosaics. Even within this forest, opportunity prevails, with no one or two tree species dominating the scene. This "green democracy" is labelled by botanists as a Mixed Evergreen Forest.

California Buckeye. Directly above is the California Buckeye tree. This beautiful tree is a deciduous member of this predominantly evergreen community. Note how it stands in stark contrast to the somber, needle-leaved evergreens. With pale gray and crooked boughs, the buckeye is full of individual character. This buckeye is quick to burst its brown buds in early spring and just as quickly drops its leaves even as early as mid-summer, especially if it is a drought year. Efficient use of available water permits a brief, but glorious, explosion of broad leaves and showy flowers, followed by the formation of the massive buckeye seeds. By late summer, only the seeds remain, hung like ornaments, taking turns to fall [They're compound leaves. I can see a picture of them; they have five leaflets.]

After that, we toured the highly informative and interesting displays in the visitors center. The thing that interested me the most was a mounted specimen of a Mountain Beaver. That secretive, nocturnal inhabitant of moist wooded areas has always intrigued me, but I'll probably never see one. This was the first mounted one I'd ever seen and I looked at it a long time.

Then we took the long drive on more poor, narrow roads out to the southern tip of Pt. Reyes. I decided to walk the 0.4 mile (each way) road to the lighthouse overlook. Jim didn't go, because he didn't want to carry his 500-mm-lensed camera that far and he didn't want to go if he couldn't take pictures. I strapped my 35-70-mm camera to my back, but didn't carry my recording gear. It was a beautiful walk on a clear day, with just a nice breeze. I took lots of photos of wildflowers and the expansive seascape, once with a nice Mule Deer for accent. My photos included lots of yellow Bush Lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*) and also Sea Thrift or Sea Pink (*Armeria maritima*).

I realized how special the day was when I got to the point and read the sign that said Pt. Reyes "may be the windiest point on the American Pacific Coast. The headland's steep profile channels and amplifies ocean winds." It said a 40 mph steady flow is common, with gusts >100 mph reported. The record is a gust of 133 mph.

From the viewing platform, I could look almost straight down to a relatively flat-topped rock just offshore covered with nesting Common Murres. They were surrounded by roiling surf and beautiful blue water. I took several photos, which should be beautiful, even though the rock itself doesn't fill the frame. I also took a look at the "more than 300" steps that one could take down to the lighthouse if it weren't Tuesday or Wednesday, when they're closed. It's the longest continuous staircase I think I've ever seen--no turns, no landings, just steps! The sign said it's equivalent to a 30-story building.

We got back to Hwy. 1 about 1:00 and I wanted to see if the little bookstore in Pt. Reyes Station was still there. It was, and I bought a couple of flower books, new revisions of the old

standards by Munz, one on shore wildflowers of Calif., Ore., & Wash., and the other on Calif. spring wildflowers. After that we ate lunch in the "Old Station" cafe. We were seated outdoors in a beautiful garden and had a very nice, although a bit pricey, luncheon. Yes, it was a luncheon, not just a lunch.

This morning, I took a long walk (about a mile each way) along one of the "trails" in Samuel P. Taylor State Park. It's actually a paved service road. There were trails alongside, but the road was easier walking. The park was originally the first paper mill in California. Taylor supplied newsprint for San Francisco newspapers and other publishers. He used old rags, not wood pulp, but still had to fell trees for his process. He also built the first fish ladder on the west coast so the salmon could get upstream. The sign made clear that it wasn't his altruistic concern for fish, but instead, he knew the influential owner of an upstream resort would set up a considerable fuss if he cut off their supply of seasonal salmon for their guests.

I had been concerned that the noisy highway would prevent me from doing much recording, but the traffic was much lighter than it had been on Monday afternoon and I did get some quiet time between vehicles. I did quite a bit of recording. The most interesting was a song that really intrigued me. A medium-sized blackish bird with white spots on its back and wings flew into a shrub and started singing. The song was very much like the Spotted Towhees I'd heard in North Dakota, but not in California, yet the bird looked like a towhee. I played the song back, but got no response. Then, several hundred yards later I heard a similar song. Along with it I heard the typical California songs and calls of the Spotted Towhee. I couldn't tell for sure if the sound was from one or two birds. When I played back this recording, a Spotted Towhee came in and perched right above my head in a tree, but didn't say anything. I was sure my tape had attracted it, for it peered down interestedly at me, but I wasn't sure which sound. So I backed up the tape and played the similar recording from down the road a bit, and the bird was interested in that, too, so I'm convinced it was a Spotted Towhee song. But I still have questions: Was the same bird alternating between a typical California song and a more eastern one, or were there two birds each doing different songs? Why was I hearing such a song here? I do have some Spotted Towhee songs recorded in Oregon (Borrer's Bird Songs and Bird Behavior recording). I'll have to relisten to them when I evaluate today's recordings. [This song was quite similar to Borrer's last Oregon song.] Maybe what I was hearing was just an Oregon-type song, but I definitely heard a song much like Calif. in the same place.

I got back around 10:45, exhausted. Jim wanted to go right away, but I said I had to rest a few minutes. After that we set out for Bodega Bay. It was only a 50-mile drive, but it took us about two hours on the narrow, rough, curvy roads. Even Hwy. 1 was that way. We were really glad to get here.

I selected the Westside Campground, a Sonoma County Regional Park, because it is closest to Bodega Head, which I remembered as being an interesting place to bird many years ago. It seems to be it was the place where Jim got some forgettable pictures of Pelagic Cormorants and Pigeon Guillemots nesting on the cliff face. It's also well away from the highway noise--on the west side of Bodega Bay. When we got here, we discovered that there are about six campsites that aren't reservable and that all the reservable ones are reserved for next weekend. If campsites are this tight on this coast, we decided we'd better grab one of the non-reservable ones and stay here through Saturday night, then move on. All of them were vacant, with two being on the waterfront and the others being back by the road. We took one of the waterfront sites, of course. They have full sun [but see below] to keep our solar panels working. (Some of the sites in intermediate rows have shade, but we really don't want that here; the temperature not getting out of the 50s here today, we don't need to worry about the heat.)

From our trailer window we can look across the bay at the town and the spit where there's another county campground similar to ours.

While we were eating lunch, I spotted five forms out on the bay. Binocular inspection revealed them to be Brant. That's a first for a trailer-window bird. (How I wish I'd kept a list over the years of all the species seen from our trailer windows.)

Later in the afternoon, the tide went out and the Brant started wading ashore--at least 50 of them. There were also about 20 Marbled Godwits--no doubt non-migrating individuals. Of course, their numbers were augmented by a large number of Western Gulls plus a few of some smaller species I have yet to figure out.

Late in the afternoon the fog started to roll in and by the time we had finished dinner at 8:00 the birds on the mudflat were completely enveloped in it. As I write this it is totally dark and I can hear the foghorn's intermittent tone. Actually, it's been going all day.

I'm pretty tired; above will probably have to be edited considerably. [Actually, it wasn't too bad.]

8:30 p.m., Monday, June 1, 2009 **Van Damme State Park, Mendocino**

We really enjoyed our stay in Bodega Bay. Watching the birdlife change with the tides right from our trailer window was endlessly fascinating. Although we never saw the sun the entire time we were there, our site was fully open, so our batteries recharged fully each day and we didn't have to scrimp on lights, water pumping and other electricity-using functions.

Thursday morning, May 28, was pretty much wasted. I asked the host where the grocery store was in town--and there wasn't one! And of course there wasn't a pharmacy either. The closest one was 18 slow miles away in Sebastopol. So that's how we spent the morning.

Late in the afternoon we drove out to Bodega Head, which is only a few miles south of our campground. I didn't take my tape recorder, but discovered I should have. I heard a wonderful sound piece: a White-crowned Sparrow singing from close range with a Song Sparrow and a fog horn in the distance. I resolved to go back the next day and try to duplicate the experience on tape. The head is covered with coastal prairie habitat with scattered yellow shrubby Lupine. Other flowers were in full bloom, too, and I took a number of photos. I didn't try to identify them at the time, so will have to do so when I get the photos. [Here's the list: Lindley Varied Lupine (*Lupinus littoralis*), Douglas Iris (*Iris douglasiana*), Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*), Californina Poppy, and more Sea Thrift/Sea Pink and yellow Bush Lupine.

When I got back from photographing the flowers, I found Jim happily engaged photographing a Botta's Pocket Gopher right next to the parking lot. The animal was so tame that it often came entirely out of its burrow and we could see its scrawny, short excuse for a tail. Jim wondered if it was the same species he had photographed in southern California, so we looked it up in Kaufman's Mammals guide. It turned out that it was. The book says it is highly variable in coloration and showed several versions, none quite as dark as the one he had. It was especially dark—almost black—from the base of its nose in a broad strip down its back, but pretty dark elsewhere, too. Kaufman attributed the darkness to the animal evolving to match the soil type, but this soil was pretty light and sort of a sandy tan. I think it's just Gloger's Rule again: Animals and birds in moist climates are darker than their relatives in dry climates.

[When we got home and went to my dentist, Mark Miller, I told him of the animal's ugly, protruding, grayish greenish-yellow front teeth and that I regretted not bringing him a copy of the picture. I knew he was an expert photographer and a whiz with Photoshop. Before I could even mentioned it, he said to email him the photo and he'd see what he could do. He really cleaned up those teeth, but balked when I suggested the animal could use a full set of implants. He wrote, "Gopher implants are not a covered service under the new RodentCare Health Plan." He told me has

done implants in valuable, highly trained police dogs that have broken canines; they have to be stainless steel for strength.]

Just as we pulled out of the parking lot, we spied a couple of buck Mule Deer (aka Black-tailed) with beautiful, large, velvety racks. Jim got a few nice shots, but wanted more.

As we were driving back, we stopped beside the road at the harbor entrance and I discovered a Long-tailed Duck (basic plumage) among the Western Grebes, cormorants, gulls, etc. on the deep water.

That evening we ate a very good fish dinner at The Tides restaurant on the other side of the bay from our campground. From the window I found a loon that really looked like a Yellow-billed, although I didn't think it could be. It had a bill sort of shaped like a thick Red-throated's, but a neck pattern more like a Common. It wasn't super-close, but I had my binoculars. Saturday night, Linda Allen told me that there had been several there all winter and she thought one was still around, so I'm confident now that was what I saw.

Friday morning, May 29, we first checked the state park campground that's nestled in the dunes and trees on the north edge of Bodega Bay. (That's where we stayed the last time we were here, and we'd have gone there this time, too, but they don't take pets. We didn't have a dog then. I can't remember the precise year, but it had to be before we got Charlie.) I didn't walk very far because there were essentially no birds. I did hear a Eurasian Collared-Dove. Amazing that they are clear up here. Not far from there was a Greater Scaup male on the water with the Western Grebes.

After that we drove up the beautiful Sonoma County coastline a ways, then stopped at a number of wayside overlooks on the way back. At one, we climbed over the dunes to view the ocean (no birds), but on the sand we found some tracks that puzzled us. They were very close together and the animal seemed to walk on the flat of its tarsus, not just on its toes like a dog or cat. Our problem was solved very soon, for at another stop there was an interpretive board with the tracks of common animals. What we had seen were Striped Skunk tracks. I wish we had taken pictures.

Saturday morning, May 30, was pretty drizzly until around 9:00, but then we were able to drive back to Bodega Head, this time with my recording gear. I spent a long time recording the White-crowned and Savannah Sparrows that allowed me to get quite close. I never got the Song Sparrow background that I was hoping for, though. [That was what I thought, but actually I got a very nice recording with both Song and Savannah Sparrow songs on it. It'll be a great workshop practice sound.] The Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrows that breed all along the coast of California (Pt. Conception to Cape Mendocino south of Eureka) are confined to the fog belt and are nonmigratory. Ornithologists have discovered that they have dialects that change with a definite boundary every 5 to 20 miles all along the coast. On this trip I've been trying to sample as many of those dialects as I can. As of this writing, I've gotten them near Morro Bay, at Pt. Lobos south of Carmel, in Pt. Reyes National Seashore, at Bodega Head, and, just this morning, at the Mendocino Headlands (not the same as Cape Mendocino, despite the name).

Jim refound the buck and got better photos. He also photographed a cooperative Savannah Sparrow. I photographed a beautiful patch of Douglas Iris that I hadn't seen the previous day we were there.

Saturday afternoon Linda Allen and Carole Sunlight, former Orange County residents who moved to Santa Rosa several years ago, drove out to spend the afternoon with us and to go out to dinner. We had emailed them as soon as we got in, hoping they'd be free. Linda did many of my workshops and has become an excellent birder. Carole has taken up bird photography. They are both retired now, have a motor home, and like to take trips similar to ours. We had a delightful visit and were sorry all over again that they no longer live in southern California.

Sunday morning, May 31, was spent driving 100 miles of Hwy. 1 north to the Mendocino area. It was a very slow and difficult drive. It took us an hour and a half to drive the first third of the route, but the road was somewhat faster after that. It wasn't as rough as portions had been farther south, but it was still very narrow and steep.

We were really glad to get here at van Damme State Park. We drove around quite a bit selecting a site. The woman at the entry booth had given us a map with the occupied sites supposedly marked on it, but we discovered she had marked as occupied those where the people had departed already. It was past noon by then and check-out time was noon. We needed two sites this time, because Donelda Warhurst was driving up to join us for a while. Finding two level sites near one another turned out to be somewhat difficult, so we finally settled for two that are maybe 50 yd apart on a steep stretch of road. Ours is the same one we had last time we were here. We still remember the Winter Wren that popped in and out of Jim's blind and even perched on his lens, but never posed out in front of his camera for photos. This time we can hear Winter Wrens, but they're not close.

It was close to 3:00 by the time we were finally settled. Donelda arrived around 6:00 and I invited her to eat dinner with us. She had driven all the way up from Riverside, where she parks her trailer at her brother's home, in one day. It had taken 13 hours. I don't know how she did it. She said she'd rather do that than stop at some RV park next to the freeway. Besides, the repairs she was having done on her truck and trailer had just been completed Saturday.

This morning I was awakened at 5:30 by the "dawn chorus" of one very loud Olive-sided Flycatcher in a Douglas-Fir right outside the trailer. By the time I had gotten up and dressed, he had been joined by other species. When I stepped out of the trailer, there was Donelda all geared up, too, pursuing the same bird. We walked around together for an hour or so, then went to our respective trailers and had breakfast.

After that we drove the three miles or so to the Mendocino Headlands area and had a wonderful morning with the birds and wildflowers. On a large rocky island off the tip is a colony of nesting Common Murres with a sizable number of Brandt's Cormorants mixed in. Western Gulls are there, too, and occasionally we'd see a Pelagic Cormorant fly in behind a rock outcropping, but never saw actual nests. A few Pigeon Guillemots were present, too, and Donelda recorded them. I didn't, because I got them much better at Montaña de Oro. I did record the murres, though. We photographed a lot of flowers and, as usual, were unable to figure out half of them when we got back to our trailers. Jim doesn't like to walk long trails carrying his heavy camera, so he paced us along the road in the truck. Thus we could just walk the trail one way, always covering new ground. [After I got home I identified the following flowers in my photos: Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), Checker Mallow (*Sidalcea malvaeflora*), Rosy Butter-n-eggs (*Triphysaria eriantha rosea*), and other species I'd also gotten farther south.]

After a nice lunch in a restaurant in Mendocino with a beautiful ocean view, we came back to the trailers and relaxed the rest of the day. Our campsites are very shady and there was no sun all day, so we'll be leaving tomorrow. I have to have full hookups so I can defrost the refrigerator and bathe Toby. We're only going to Fort Bragg, maybe 20 miles away, so will spent the morning here in van Damme SP.

8:45 p.m., Wednesday, June 3, 2009 **Pomo RV Park, Fort Bragg, CA**

Yesterday morning, Tuesday, June 2, I got up at 5:15 and went outside to record the dawn chorus in its entirety. Donelda showed up soon afterwards. As before, the Olive-sided Flycatcher dominated the soundscape with one "Quick THREE beers" after another in rapid succession. One

sound puzzled us, an incessant chittering that seemed to come from several birds flying around above the treetops. I had covered all the swallows in the recent workshop and neither of us thought it sounded like them (although later in the day we identified Violet-Green). Finally after it was broad daylight we were able to see that they were Vaux's Swifts. That made us feel better about not recognizing the sound.

We walked part way down the steep road to the creek level until we were even with the tops of the huge Red Alders there, and then started hearing Warbling Vireo, Wilson's Warbler, and more Swainson's Thrushes.

After breakfast we drove to the end of the campground in the lower level and walked the Fern Canyon trail a short distance. Three species were always in earshot, Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, and Winter Wren. I tried to call one of the latter in with playback for Jim to photograph, but without success. When the trail started to climb steeply out of the canyon, we turned around and went back.

From there we drove out of the park, south 1/4 mile, then east several miles to the Pygmy Forest section of the park. This section of the Mendocino coast has well preserved coastal terraces of various ages. The upper, and older, ones have developed an impermeable hardpan, so water collects and becomes more acidic. The soil nourishment is depleted and the plants are quite stunted. Here grows the Gowen Cypress and a rare stunted subspecies of Lodgepole/Shore Pine, *bolanderi*. Also present and in full bloom were Western Azaleas and Pacific/California Rhododendrons. They require acid soil, but there the soil is almost too poor, so there are better specimens in the more robust forests nearby.

I recorded the text of this sign in the Pygmy Forest:

Rhododendron: In the Pygmy Forest the California Rhododendron, or California Rose Bay, a common shrub along the northern Pacific coast, is dwarfed. It is five times taller in the neighboring Redwood Forest. It grows best in acid soils and is less dwarfed than the other plants. In spring its pinkish red blooms dominate the landscape with spectacular displays.

By then it was time to go back and get out of our campsites before check-out time at noon. We drove north only about eight miles to the Pomo RV Park, which had sounded nice in the Trailer Life Guide. It turned out to be really nice, as nice as any state park--and with full hookups. The sites are in a natural forest setting with tall pines and an understory of shrubs. Each site has a generous curtain of native shrubs separating it from the next one, including a few rhododendrons in bloom. The entry area to the park has lawn with scattered domestic rhododendrons of all colors in full bloom. We were given back-to-back sites.

The sun actually came out for most of the afternoon, so Donelda and I sat outside in our comfortable chairs and listened to the birds. Jim set up his feeding station, but it didn't get too active right away. He stayed inside and enjoyed his favorite political programs on cable TV, a luxury we haven't had before on this trip. In fact, we haven't had any TV of any kind for a long time. Today the feeding station gradually started to attract more birds and animals: Spotted Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow, Steller's Jay, Western Gray Squirrel, and even a Common Raven. Donelda has tried photographing the latter, even to the point of setting up her blind, but so far the bird has departed whenever anyone is outside.

This morning I had to do some long overdue chores, defrosting the refrigerator and bathing Toby. These both require hookups, which was why we selected this park instead of another state park. We probably would not have discovered this place if we hadn't needed them. Usually private RV parks are just parking lots with the sites way too close together. I also went to the grocery store,

an especially nice one with lots of unusual brands. I forget the name, but it's in the large shopping center on the northeast corner of SR 1 and SR 20. It seems more like one that might be found in Newport Beach, rather than old Fort Bragg. Fort Bragg has really changed since Mother and I used to stay here years ago, when it was hard to even find a decent motel.

At first we were only going to stay 2 nights, then we decided maybe three. Finally this afternoon, we decided we might as well stay through the weekend. That will entail moving to a different site for Friday and Saturday nights.

This afternoon Donelda and I went to the nearby botanic garden around 4:00, only to discover it is a much larger place than we realized and that it closed at 5:00. So we decided to come back another day—part of the reason why we decided to stay through the weekend. Rather than go back to the trailer, we drove down to Jug Handle State Reserve and looked around a bit. The coastal prairie section was absolutely carpeted with Blue-eyed Grass and other flowers. And I found some nice specimens of Grand Fir, a conifer I'd never succeeded in photographing satisfactorily. We didn't have cameras with us, so must go back there another time. I also want to tape-record the very long text about the geology & ecology of the coastal terraces in this area.

This evening we went to the fish restaurant down in Noyo Harbor, where I always like to go when I'm in this town. This place also has become very upscale. I had a good dinner, but Jim said his broiled prawns & scallops on a skewer were so loaded with spices and garlic that he couldn't taste anything else. Donelda and I tried to keep away from garlic. We quizzed the stupid waitress about what had it in it. Then, since the vegetables supposedly had a few onions, Donelda settled on a salad. Its dressing was loaded with garlic, so Jim ate that, too. I had the mixture of vegetables, and could find no onions or garlic in them, and they were delicious. The restaurant overlooks Noyo Harbor, but we had to settle for just a lot of gulls, Western or Glaucous-winged x Western mostly, it seemed.

5:45 p.m., Thursday, June 4, 2009 Pomo RV Park, Fort Bragg, CA

This morning Donelda and I went to Russian Gulch State Park, which is just north of van Damme and only about six miles south of here. Jim and I stayed there many years ago, but had a terrible time getting into the campsite. Usually when a campground gives a maximum trailer length that is shorter than ours, there are quite a few sites we can fit into, but here "24 feet" means 24 feet! Our trailer is 26 feet long. But I still remembered the delightful trail that goes out the far end of the campground. It's the paved remains of an old logging road and easy walking with very little altitude change. The Russian Gulch creek is very quiet and the walls of the canyon are very steep and keep extraneous sounds to a minimum, so it's an ideal place to record. It rained a little bit last night and was threatening today, but we carried umbrellas and plastic garbage bags for our gear and went anyway. We met very few people along the way.

We heard only a small number of bird species, but many individuals of each. We were amazed at the variety of sounds from two of them. Wilson's Warbler songs ranged from almost uniform to distinctly two-parted to noticeably multiparted--maybe as many as four types of notes with subtle transitions from one to the next. Swainson's Thrush calls were also very interesting. In addition to the traditional "whit" and "whee" (or "pay"), there seemed to be a continuum of calls intermediate between them. (I had noticed that once before in the Cascades of Oregon.) But what really amazed us was one Swainson's which did all of the above call types plus song, and then went into a rough, scratchy scold that ended in sort of a "whit." Sibley does mention a sound like that, but I'll have to look up the significance of it when I get home. [It's probably the "whine" call discussed in *The Birds of North America* No. 540, p. 12, which says, "Function somewhat ambiguous. Heard

infrequently early in breeding season, but recurs later, seemingly associated with alarm for nestlings or recent fledglings." It's quite likely there was a nest in the thicket from which the sound came.] Also present were large numbers of Winter Wrens, Steller's Jays, Common Ravens, and one Northern Flicker, which called only twice.

The trail goes about 2 1/2 miles to a waterfall, but did so much recording that we only walked probably about a mile of it, then retraced our steps. Then we drove out to the waterfront, which is one point south of the Mendocino Headlands we visited a few days ago. The trail from the parking lot to the cliff-face passes through coastal scrub before ending in a little coastal prairie. The variety and brilliance of the wildflower displays in both habitats was amazing. We took a number of photos, some of individual flowers and some of the general displays. There is a blowhole in the rocks below the cliff, but it wasn't blowing today. In fact, there was almost no surf at all.

[After we got home I identified the plants I photographed: Coastal Onion (*Allium dichlamydeum*), California Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula vacillana*), Paintbrush (probably *Castilleja mendocinensis*), Bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*), Wild Cucumber or Coast Manroot (*Marah oreganus*), Rattlesnake Grass (*Briza maculata*), and Sea Thrift/Sea Pink.

Jim didn't go with us, not wanting to hang around a tiny parking area for several hours. He stayed in the campground, hoping to get photographs of the raven that comes in and gobbles up Magic Meal, but the bird is pretty cagy.

6:30 a.m., Sunday, June 7, 2009 **Pomo RV Park, Fort Bragg, CA**

This park gets its name, Pomo, from the Indian tribe that was here when the European settlers arrived. A small remnant of them remains.

Thursday night we drove to the Noyo Harbor area of Fort Bragg, where I always like to go for a fish dinner. We ate at Silvers at the Wharf, same location, but different name from the place I always liked. As with so many restaurants we've encountered up the coast, this one has become very upscale. It was almost impossible to get just plain fish, and there were probably more meat dishes on the menu than fish. With some insistence, I was able to get sole almandine with mixed fresh vegetables and polenta. It was very good. Jim ordered mixed shellfish on a skewer, but it had been marinated in a spicy, garlicky (he reeked for 2 days) sauce, so he said he couldn't even taste the prawns and scallops. It was served on a bed of all sorts of stuff, all mixed up together. He ate most of it and said it was OK. Donelda ordered the equivalent of the old-fashioned "Captain's Platter" or "Admiral's Feast." She said the oysters were good, but the rest was so-so. She can't eat garlic or onions and was told there were onions in the mixed vegetables (there weren't), so she decided on a salad. The stupid waitress didn't register the fact that if she didn't want garlic in her entree, she wouldn't want it in her salad dressing either. After one bite of it, she passed it over to Jim. The servings were small and the prices were high on top of everything else. The only good thing was a \$6.00 serving of Olallie-berry cobbler, which Donelda and Jim shared. I ate one bite, and it was very good, but I can make the same thing from our backyard blackberries.

Friday morning we had to move our trailers to a new site, because the one we were in was reserved for the weekend. We actually like the new one better. It's backed into the trees and bushes more. We can hear Swainson's Thrushes back in the shrubs and Golden-crowned Kinglets overhead, so Jim sat in his blind all day Friday, June 5, hoping they would come to his water drip, but no luck.

Donelda and I spent the morning at the Botanic Garden, which is only a quarter of a mile north of the RV park and across Highway 1. It doesn't open until 9:00 a.m., which is why we decided to visit it on trailer-moving day. From the highway the place just looks like a nice, big plant nursery. You

get no idea of the extent of the place. It actually extends all the way to the ocean front, half a mile away, but with many side trails to explore. There are two sections. The nearer section has plants from all over the world that grow in this climate and soil. The rhododendrons were in full bloom and I couldn't resist photographing a lot of them up close. Rhododendrons are found in only three places in the world. Most are in the Himalayas. A couple hundred species are in New Guinea, and just two are in North America, the Azalea being one of them.

I taped the texts of some of the signs for future reference:

Rhododendrons represent a large genus in the Heath family, with about 1200 species known worldwide. The geographic distribution of rhododendrons is quite interesting, showing a remarkable concentration of species in two relatively small areas. More than 700 species are found in the regions where China, Tibet, Burma, and Assam meet the Himalayan chain. These Sino-Himalayan species are the source of the great majority of our "horticultural" rhododendrons. The genus has a secondary center of about 300 species in New Guinea. There are two rhododendrons native to California, *Rhododendron macrophyllum*, the California Rose-Bay, *Rhododendron occidentale*, the Western Azalea.

Their large, showy flowers and facility to hybridize have rendered the rhododendrons a horticultural favorite. A wide variety of types are available, from creeping shrublets to moderately-sized trees, with shades of white, pink, red, mauve, and yellow represented in the flowers. The majority of rhododendrons are evergreens, but some, for which the name "Azalea" has been given, are deciduous. Rhododendrons generally require an acidic soil and a constant supply of moisture. Their need for a well-aerated root system probably exceeds that of any other garden plant. Hence they are commonly grown on small mounds of loosely packed soil. The northern California coast, with soils rich in organic matter, provides an ideal habitat for the cultivation of many rhododendron species.

Equisetum or Horsetail gets its name from the vegetative stalk that resembles a bushy horse's tail. It's believed to have been around for more than 300,000,000 years. In prehistoric times it grew 50 feet tall with trunks a foot or more in diameter. Today's Equisetum are mainly in the three to five foot range. Closely allied to fern and mosses, but resembling rushes or bamboo, about 25 species still exist today. They grow in most climates and in any soil, and while effective in marshy areas, they are extremely invasive and difficult to remove.

Ever since I presented my Mountains of the West workshop in 1998, I've been fascinated by conifers. Since I'm planning to redo that workshop in a couple of years, I was particularly interested in the conifer section. They had a number of spruces and firs from elsewhere in the world. I took lots of photos and will use them as practice slides to help the students learn to distinguish those two types of trees from pines, hemlocks, etc. They also had a specimen of the Chinese redwood. It's the only species that doesn't grow in North America. This tree was perhaps 25 feet tall. There's also a section of heathers, which they say bloom in the fall. Dahlias bloom then, too. But I think right now is probably the best time to visit. There were countless exquisite flowers in an amazing variety of shapes and colors. Some were out in the open, while others were tucked away in shady nooks.

All of the above were behind an 8-foot high chain-link fence to keep the deer out. We exited that section through a beautiful gate, with an insert of sticks to make it look natural. In the outer portion were more Rhododendrons plus a lot of native plants, in a more unkempt, natural-looking arrangement. As at Russian Gulch, the forest transitioned to the shrubland, which in turn became the coastal prairie. However, this land was once used as farmland, so the variety of plants was much

less. I really think my photos at Russian Gulch are much nicer. Mendocino Headlands and Jug Handle are nicer, too.

On our way back, we heard woodpeckers drumming in the Bishop Pine woodland. We recorded them and I think we got Pileated, Red-breasted Sapsucker, and Acorn, all in the same sequence. Many other birds were singing, too. I'll have to listen to the tape to confirm the above. [I'm still not 100% sure.]

My knee has been bothering me from all the walking on uneven terrain, so I was glad to get back to the trailer and rest. In the late afternoon the sun came out, so we decided it would be a good time to drive back to Jug Handle State Reserve and photograph the Grand Fir in one of the places where it grows naturally. It's common in city parks, etc., especially in the Puget Sound area. There were several ancient, wind-shaped specimens with gnarled trunks and a lot of young ones with classic Christmas tree shape. I was able to get close-ups of the foliage on the young ones. It was really pretty because it had both old and new foliage. The interesting thing about this tree is that it has needles of two lengths. They lie in flat, comblike sprays, two on each side of the branch. A row of short needles is right above a row of longer ones, the average lengths of each being about 2 and 3 inches, respectively. The two lengths were really obvious in these fresh specimens, but on some older branches, they have sort of become intermingled. I also photographed the bark of the old trees. The only thing I couldn't get were the cones. Fir cones grow at the tops of mature trees and disintegrate on the tree, rather than falling intact to the ground. The small trees may be too young for cones, and I couldn't see any on the old ones--maybe wrong time of year.

I also recorded on tape the contents of the interpretive signs about the natural history of this place. First, the sign for general audience:

Walk a Giant Staircase. Along the watershed of Jug Handle Creek, nature has created and preserved a remarkable ecological staircase, where three ocean wave-cut terraces formed beneath ancient seas rise from shore in a stairstep fashion, each step being about 100 ft higher and 100,000 years older than the one beneath it, and each one supporting a distinctive association of plants, animals, and soil. The staircase provides one of the finest records anywhere of the fluctuations of sea level that accompanied the advance and retreat of glaciers during the last great Pleistocene Ice Age. It may also constitute the most clearcut display of ecological succession in the world. At Jug Handle we can follow step-by-step 300,000 years of natural history, where the younger terraces represent ecological stages through which the upper and older terraces passed hundreds of thousands of years ago. The story progresses from the tidepools to the grasslands and coastal forests of the first terrace on to the [unintelligible] forest of the second terrace and on to the third terrace, the Mendocino Pygmy Forest, among the tiniest woods in the world.

The process of stair formation is complex and imperfectly understood, but seems to depend mainly on the steady, uniform uplifting of bedrock possessing just the right physical characteristics, a combination of conditions that in California obtains most perfectly along the 20-mile stretch of Mendocino coast between Ft. Bragg and Navarro River. Each step of the staircase was cut into sandstone bedrock by the rising seas that marked periods of glacial retreat. Subsequent glacial advances produced receding sea, which then deposited miscellaneous sands, gravels, and clays on the bedrock platform. At the same time the entire coastal mass was rising, as it still is, and the terraces were lifted higher and higher, like the steps of a gigantic escalator. Today's interglacial ocean has cut another embryonic terrace offshore, and if this coast continues to rise, this new step may itself overlook some future sea.

Perhaps more than any other natural area, this staircase is valuable as a complete, functioning example of ecological succession. The processes here enchant us more than the results. There is

elegance to the story that unfolds here, and if the final result is a scrawny, malnourished cousin to the grand coastal forests to the north, its very oddity causes us to wonder and explore.

There was a more technical explanation of what's going on--just typed in large print on four pages of ordinary paper, laminated, and tacked to a different bulletin board. I left most of the grammatical anomalies as they were, suggesting corrections for a few. Here's the text:

THE ECOLOGICAL STAIRCASE AT JUG HANDLE RESERVE

What it is. A series of elevated marine terraces, which begin at the ocean edge and rise inland like the steps of a giant staircase. They are evidence that the coastline has been rising over many thousands of years.

What caused the marine terraces. Continental drift is the cause of the uplifting. The North American Plate of the Earth's crust, which underlies the North American continent, is slowly moving in a westerly direction, riding up over the edge of the Pacific Plate, which underlies the Pacific Ocean. The border along which the relative movement between these two immense crustal plates is occurring is the San Andreas Fault. Irregular, jerking movements between the crustal plates along the faults are the cause of most of our earthquakes.

Another major factor affecting the levels at which the ocean has cut terraces has been the series of Ice Ages, which have occurred during the past million years or so. During an ice age a tremendous amount of the world's water is locked up in continental ice caps, which cause the ocean level to be much lower than at present. If all the ice present on the earth were to suddenly melt, the oceans' level would rise 100 to 200 ft. At the extreme point of the most recent ice age, some thousands of years ago, the surface of the ocean stood at a much lower level than now relative to the land. Then the channels of the rivers were being actively cut down into the rock by the forces of erosion. As the glaciers retreated and the sea level rose, the lower reaches of these rivers stalled and dropped their load of sediment, choking their channels.

The ocean is actively carving a new terrace in the rocky edge of the continent at the present time. As one moves up the terrace staircase, each succeeding higher level is older than the lower one preceding it. Thus the oldest terrace is the highest and most inland.

The soils on the higher terraces are very old, and some of them are of an extreme nature, supporting a pygmy forest.

The rocks of the Mendocino area belong to the Franciscan Formation. They consist principally of Greywacke Sandstone, shale, and greenstone, with some conglomerates present. The sandstone and shale originated as layers of sand and clay-silt materials, which were deposited in water, and they became cemented together eventually. Conglomerates are the result of intermixed layers of gravel, pebbles, and fine materials, which became cemented together. This rock formation took place in a shallow sea occupying a huge down-warping trough that is estimated to have lasted at least 50 million years. During this long period of time there was a great landmass called Cascadia, which stood above sea level ten miles or more west of the present coastline. The local sediments were largely derived from the erosion of Cascadia. Cascadia's rocks were weathered mechanically and as the feldspars weathered they became cemented into the Greywacke Sandstone.

What is podsolization? A soil-forming process that occurs on the elevated terraces. Calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron [ions] (bases) are derived from the slow weathering of mineral particles in the soil. These leached downward in the soil, leaving a bleached, acidic, upper zone. A clay or iron hardpan forms 18 to 48 inches below the surface. This process has had the longest time to proceed on the nearly level upper, older terraces and it is there we find the most extreme soils.

The water that forms in pools above the very poorly draining hard-panned, podsolized soil is tea-colored as a result of acid humus. This occurs on the upper terraces. As a stream cuts through an old terrace, the angle of the surface changes, drainage improves, the hardpan breaks up, the amount of a valuable [sic, available?] nutrients increases, acidity decreases, and a different, more prosperous, healthy plant community becomes established.

It has been estimated that each higher terrace is about 100,000 years older than the one below it. Relatively good growth of the plant cover reflects better drainage and more available nutrients. Ancient sand dunes on the higher terraces have weathered to produce Noyo soils, which support mainly Bishop Pines. Stratified and finer-textured beach materials of the older terraces have given rise to Aborigine soils, with a multitude of brown iron streaks and patches mottling their clays. A dense hardpan of up to 61% clay is characteristic of these soils. Acidity is very high and the nutritionally important bases, Ca, Mg, K, and Fe, are exceedingly low in the zone above the hardpan.

Now let's take a look at the Blacklock soil, on which the most extreme dwarfism of the Pygmy Forest occurs. The top 4 inches has an ashy gray A-1 layer, which overlays a white sand A-2 layer, which rests on an iron-cemented hardpan, the B layer. Below the hardpan, where roots do not normally penetrate, the material is essentially unweathered. During the rainy season the water table rests on the hardpan. Puddles of water stand on the surface, and the roots of the plants are under water for some months. When the rain stops, the water-logged zone above the hardpan dries out and then [t]he dwarfs have to endure desert-like conditions until the rainy season returns. Certain organic compounds called chelates have the ability to incorporate in their structure atoms [ions] of Fe, Mg, K, and Ca derived from the weathering of rock materials, rendering them mobile, where they travel downward, leaching into the cemented hardpan below. Podsolization involves this leaching downward of these chelates, with their atoms of these nutritionally important metals to lower levels of the soil, where they accumulate to form the hardpan. The impoverished upper zone consists primarily of white quartz sand. The needles and leaves of the trees and bushes of the pygmy zone synthesize carboxyl groups that lead to the humic acids that give the drainage waters their distinctive tea color. Blacklock soil has a pH ranging from 2.8 to 3.9, making it one of the most acidic (leach mineral depleted) soils to be found anywhere. The nitrogen supply is very limited and nitrogen-supplying bacteria cannot grow here. Ca, Mg, Ca, and Fe and other trace minerals are in exceedingly short supply. Earthworms cannot live in such an acidic soil. There are not enough palatable roots for gophers. Thus the soil lies century after century compacted, unaerated, highly acidic, nutrient leached, sometimes ravaged by fire, water-logged much of the year, baked for the rest of the year. Consequently very few plants can live in such a soil, and those that do survive are dwarfed and more or less sickly.

Causes for the Pygmy Forest. There is no simple answer to the simple question, "What causes the Pygmy Forest?" The factors include (1) drainage or the lack thereof; (2) Oxidation or reduction of nutritional compounds into highly chelated, mobile, downward-leaching, hard-pan forming, inert, nutritionally useless forms; (3) Harmful nitrate formation; (4) Hardpan; (5) Extreme acidic soil conditions and associated aluminum toxicity; (6) the amount of rainfall and when it comes and when it doesn't; (7) the extraordinary tenacity of certain plants to grow in extreme conditions on uncompromising soils; (8) the underlying rocks in the area; (9) the advance and retreat of continental ice sheet, global warming and cooling; (10) plate tectonics, massive movements of the earth's crust on a sea of molten rock underneath; (11) the uplift and terrace forming along the western North America over significant periods of geologic time.

Lichens are common in the Pygmy Forest and on the bare soil. Lichens are dual organisms consisting of an algae growing together with a fungus in a symbiotic relationship. Lichens are abundant along the Ecological Staircase and are an excellent indicator of environmental health,

because of their extreme sensitivity to air pollution, especially sulfur dioxide. Where lichens do not grow could not possibly be a healthful environment for humans as well. Very few lichens can survive in industrial cities.

Coast Redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, is one of the marvels of this area. The fossil record shows that it has been living on earth unchanged since Jurassic times for over 130,000,000 years. It is a magnificent living fossil, and being the tallest tree on earth, the record holder is 386 ft. high. When a Coast Redwood is cut down or destroyed by fire, a circle of sprouts from the still-living root system will generally spring up to replace it. This remarkable ability to regenerate trunks makes it possible for a Coast Redwood to live in extreme cases from sprouting seed to final demise for as long as 9,000 years.

Yesterday morning, Saturday, June 6, while Jim was again keeping vigil in his blind, Donelda and I drove north of Fort Bragg a couple of miles and visited a couple of spots. The first was Glass Beach. It's a place a glass factory used to dump their scrap for many decades. Lots of surf-rounded pieces of multi-colored glass are available for the picking-up on the beach. It's best to look for them where the tides had churned up the sand. Donelda walked down there and came back in a few minutes with a handful of colorless, green, and yellow pieces. She said she looked for blue, but couldn't find any. White-crowned Sparrows were singing and calling along the trail, and I recorded them for my collections. They're also in our campground, but singing a different song from here. In fact, one of their songs is very much like the local race of Spotted Towhee. I didn't believe they were White-crowns until I saw one actually singing.

From there we went to MacKerricher State Park, a large ocean-front park. We spent most of our time on a beautiful boardwalk trail through a dense deciduous woodland next to a large lake. No new species, but nice examples of ones we've heard other places. Despite the weekend crowds elsewhere in the park, we pretty much had this trail to ourselves. It actually goes all the way around the lake, but the last part isn't a boardwalk, so I decided to return the way I came, since my knee is still bothering me. I urged Donelda to do the rest of it, but she wouldn't. (She said she comes up here often to visit her sister in Crescent City and can save it for another time.)

From there we went to the coastal boardwalk, which goes out to a viewpoint where you can see a Harbor Seal rookery. We went part way and viewed the rookery from a distance. Again, my knee was the reason for not continuing. I spent the afternoon resting it.

This morning Donelda set out at around 5:30 for MacKerricher to record the "dawn chorus" from the lakeside trail. I've made pancake batter and must cook it when I finish with this diary. We're leaving here in mid-morning to drive the 100 miles to Myers Flat in the middle of the Avenue of the Giants portion of the redwoods.

8:45 p.m., Tuesday, June 9, 2009 **Patrick's Point State Park, Trinidad, CA**

The hundred miles from Fort Bragg to Myers Flat took the better part of three hours. The first half was on Highway 1, which was very slow, although smoother than I remember it was last time we took it. The remainder on US 101 was moderately fast.

We stayed at the Redwood RV & Camp in Myers Flat, where we've stayed two or three times before. The place is a bit down at the heels in terms of restrooms and showers, but the grounds have grassy sites with a wide variety of tall trees, grass, shrubs, etc.--and of course birds. Myers Flat is on the flood plain of a large bend in the South Fork of the Eel River, and you can walk down to the river from the campground. Donelda did it and found several Spotted Sandpipers. I found a Cassin's Vireo nest here many years ago, but didn't succeed this time.

The day was sunny and pleasantly warm, being a bit inland and away from the cool ocean, so I sat outside on the lawn in the shade most of the late afternoon. For dinner I cooked fresh Pacific salmon (on the grill) and sweet corn, both delightfully fresh. I had purchased them in Ft. Bragg.

Yesterday, Monday, June 8, we drove north along the Avenue of the Giants, stopping first at Williams Grove Picnic Area, where I recorded the following sign text:

CANOE FIRE

Canoe fire reignites healthy cycles in the redwood forest--fires in the central parts of a healthy redwood forest. Plants and animals in this forest have lived with fire for thousands of years. Without fire this forest would not be the same.

Lightning strikes. On September 3, 2003, a major lightning storm ignited hundreds of small fires. One of these little fires became one of the largest burns on record in an old-growth redwood forest. This fire came to be known as the "Canoe Fire, " which would eventually burn over 11,000 acres at Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

In the old growth the Canoe fire burned slow and calm as it swept away the litter of leaves, needles and woody debris from the forest floor. As the fire moved up the canyon slope, the flames climbed up the younger trees, igniting their canopies and causing a roaring fire. Most of the old-growth trees here were unharmed by the fire.

REDWOOD ADAPTATIONS TO FIRE

High branches. The high branches of a redwood tree prevent flames from climbing up to the canopy of the tree. This helped redwoods avoid the potentially fatal flames of the fire. Look up to the canopy of the forest. How high are the first branches on a redwood?

Thick bark. Thick, tough bark protects redwood trees. This bark can be up to one foot thick. Look closely at the bark. Can you see signs of previous fires? Most of the charred bark you see on these trees is caused by creep. Creep occurs when the heat of the fire on the forest floor causes the outer bark to smolder and creep up the tree like the fuse on a firecracker.

Burls. Burls sprout new trunks when damaged by fire. A burl is a mass of dormant buds, but can be found on the base, trunk, or branches of a tree. These dormant buds can produce sprouts after a tree is damaged. Redwood burls can weigh 50 tons, as much as ten school buses, making them some of the largest in the world.

HEALTHY CYCLES CONTINUE IN THE REDWOOD FOREST

What happens in the forest after the fire? After the glowing embers cool to a nutrient-rich ash that enriches the soil, the redwood forest begins the process of regrowth and recovery.

"Fairy rings" sprout around the base[s] of fire-damaged trees. Look for a circle of trees surrounding a burned-out stump. This circle is called a fairy ring. This new growth forms after a damaged tree sprouts from its base.

Fire leaves ash in the soil, which contains minerals and nutrients. These nutrients help plants grow. The grasses, shrubs, and trees that begin to regrow in burned areas provide a great home for small animals and provide forage for deer and other browsing animals.

Hollowed out areas in burned trees are called "goose pens" because they were used by early settlers to hold geese and other livestock. Goose pens provide nesting sites for birds and homes for small animals.

Conclusion. Fire reignites healthy cycles in the old-growth forest. Though the effects of fire may appear destructive at times, fire brings regrowth and renewal to the redwood forest.

Leaving Williams Grove, we visited other interpretive sites in Humboldt Redwoods State Park, driving about 20 miles north on the Avenue of the Giants, which I never tire of, although I've been coming back here every few years all my life. Donelda had never visited these places, so it was fun seeing it through her eyes. She borrowed Jim's 17-35-mm lens to take wide-angle shots from top to bottom of a couple of the tallest redwoods. We both recorded lots of Winter Wren, Varied Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, and other sounds. Donelda got a couple of sounds that puzzled her. One turned out to be a MacGillivray's and the other she thinks may be a Nashville, but it's pretty different from the ones I'm used to in the Sierra Nevada, so I wonder if she's right. We both got probable Hermit Warbler sounds.

This morning we went back to the Founders Grove nature trail at around 8:00 before there were very many people. Yesterday we had heard and seen Winter Wrens countersinging right beside the trail, and I hoped I could record and lure one out for Jim to photograph. It took quite a bit of time, but I think he succeeded. He had problems with his flash not recycling fast enough, but ultra-fresh batteries solved that problem. Then the bird had a tendency to do the fly-bys instead of landing where it could be photographed. This is a bird we've had trouble with for decades, so it was wonderful that he was able to get several shots that should be pretty nice--although it's hard to be sure when the little mite never seemed to hold still. [He got a few keepers.]

We went back to the trailers, ate an early lunch, then departed to drive the 78 miles to Patrick's Point State Park. We got adjacent bluff-top sites with spectacular views north along the Pacific Coast of Agate Beach. It was about 3:30 when we got situated. Unfortunately we can only stay two nights, because the campground is full starting Thursday. Donelda and I (independently) discovered a Swainson's Thrush on territory right at the top of the steps to the beach 100 ft below. Because so many people pass that area and also because the foliage is limited and sparse, I thought it might be a place where Jim could finally get some first-rate photos of the Russet-backed race of that species, something we've been needing for many years. He went over there in the late afternoon and came back in only a few minutes with a lot of shots in his camera. He said the light will be even better in the morning--no bright sky behind its favorite perch. Donelda was there while he was photographing them and helped him locate the bird, because he can't hear the song. They didn't use any playback, though. I did use playback on the wren this morning, though.

All in all, today was a pretty good day for us. Jim got two birds that were on my list of goals for this trip, birds I've been hearing and recording well for days. You may remember that Jim sat in his blind for many hours hoping a Swainson's Thrush would come in to his water drip at Fort Bragg.

4:15 p.m., Friday, June 12, 2009 Klamath River RV Park, Klamath, CA

When we first got settled at Patrick's Point on Tuesday, we drove over to the Visitors Center and bought a couple of books each. Donelda had been there recently and the person in charge had told her that a Pileated Woodpecker nested near there. But this time we encountered only an elderly volunteer who knew nothing about birds—just how to charge things on credit cards. He didn't know what a "bird list" was, let alone what a Pileated Woodpecker was or where it might be found. So we were on our own.

Wednesday morning, June 10, we had Jim drive us over to the Visitors Center and told him we'd walk all the way back if necessary, but we found we could contact him by radio wherever we walked. (We finally found some good radios at Wal-Mart before we left home.) This time the man Donelda talked to some time ago was on duty, so she asked him about the Pileated, but he wasn't much help. It turned out that he didn't know where the nest tree was, just that they were around and occasionally heard. So we spent a little while wandering around in the deep Sitka Spruce (mostly)

forest, hoping for that elusive bird, but didn't hear or see one. We definitely saw their workings, for many dead trees had been literally torn apart in places. The next day when we were in similar dense forest habitat we heard one fairly distant short series of calls that was probably Pileated, but that was all.

We gave up on the forest around the Visitors center and headed toward the neglected and overgrown native plant garden and promptly got lost on the labyrinth of trails. Fortunately it was quite small, so we got back on the main trail OK. After that we just took a number of main trails, which went through a variety of habitats, forest, riparian, meadow, coastal bluff, etc. It went past some rocky outcrops, one of which was an Indian ceremonial spot and had a trail to the top, where there was a viewpoint. Donelda climbed the steps, but I waited on a bench at the bottom. They were definitely not my kind of steps!

We ended up at the coast near an empty group campground. In the dense deciduous growth--tall trees and shrubs all blended together—we heard a warbler-type song. It was trilled and very fast like an Orange-crowned, but had an abrupt transition in the middle to a higher pitch, and then descended. Most Orange-crowns have songs that are so subtly two-parted that the change is nearly imperceptible. They just sound like they're swelling a bit in pitch and amplitude, then tapering off near the end. Donelda was convinced it was another Nashville like the one she said she saw singing in the redwoods a couple of days previously, but I just couldn't buy that. I've never heard a Nashville singing such a fast song.

But what was it? I got very good recordings of the bird, but we just couldn't see it. I tried playback here and there, but always I was outside the bird's territory on the road below and so it didn't take offense. Finally we gave up and wandered along the road toward Patrick's Point itself and realized that there were two birds singing the same type of song. This time we found a secluded picnic site that had been cut back into the shrubs about thirty feet. When we went back there, we were nearly surrounded by suitable habitat. This time when I played the song back, a bird flew into a Red Alder 50 feet above our heads, but close enough that we could identify it as an Orange-crowned. But what an interesting song! It starts out with a rapid trill on a steady pitch like a typical Orange-crowned, then the trill abruptly jumps to a much higher pitch and either remains on that pitch or descends gradually to the finish. This unusual finale is about the same length as the initial trill, and the total length of the song is about that of a typical O-c. I'm going to have to listen to my Borror warbler tape when I get home and see if he has anything as distinctive as that on it. [Later: There's nothing. It has some single trills and some which gradually descend in pitch near the end, but nothing with the abrupt transition to a much higher pitch.] Back at our campsites, we heard Orange-crowns singing typical songs.

Near the Patrick's Point parking lot we found White-crowned Sparrows and recorded their tinny "tink" call, but they did no singing. (We went back the next morning at 6:00 a.m. and successfully recorded the song. Two different individuals were singing essentially the same song, although frequently the final note or two was omitted.) Since we're now north of Cape Mendocino, this is the *pugetensis* subspecies, which is hard to distinguish visually from *nuttalli*.

By then it was almost noon, so we called Jim on the radio to come and pick us up. The afternoon was spent watching the critters at Jim's feeding station. In addition to Steller's Jays and Song Sparrows, he also was getting a very dark chipmunk species, which I identified from Kaufman's mammal guide as the Shadow Chipmunk. The old Townsend's Chipmunk has now been split into four species, and this is one of them. They are best identified by range and somewhat by call. I recalled hearing this animal's call earlier in the day, but never got a recording of it. The book said it didn't call very much, and that was certainly true.

Thursday morning, June 11, we all drove south in the park to Palmer's Point, where there is a view of a lot of sea stacks. The sky was totally overcast, but still the scene was impressive. Many of the stacks were absolutely covered with Harbor Seals and California Sea Lions. The interpretive display mentioned Steller's Sea Lions, but we didn't scope the rocks to see if there were any. The animals were calling loudly and constantly. Most of the sounds were pretty much the same and sounded like the familiar California call, but occasionally we'd hear a lower, rougher call. Whether that was just another California call or the much rarer Steller's I don't know. The sign said the seals are usually silent.

Donelda and I walked back a ways along the road, but heard nothing but birds we'd recorded plenty of times already. We ended up in a day-use picnic area around 10:00 and decided to spend the remaining time before we had to return to get our trailers out before noon trying to photograph Winter Wrens. There were a lot of them there. I recorded one and played it back. I think Donelda got off a couple of desperation shots, but I don't think Jim tried for any. They're hard subjects because they hate to leave cover.

We had wanted to stay at Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, but had learned a couple of days earlier that there was no hope over the weekend--and even during the week from now on, since school has let out. We were going to head for Crescent City, but then we caught sight of some nice-looking RV parks in the little town of Klamath. We're in one that's a mile off US-101 by road, but actually considerably closer. It's on the south side of the Klamath River and we got sites with beautiful views of the Klamath River about a mile or two up from its mouth. I learned from a book today that the Klamath is California's second-largest river, after the Sacramento.

This morning I was awakened around 5:00 to the dawn chorus of robins. Donelda had been rereading Kroodsma's book, *The Singing Life of Birds*, and had learned that at dawn they sing a different type of song, which he calls the "hisselly" song. In it some of the notes are high and thin, not full and fluty. I decided to get up and record this song, although I probably already have it from other trips. By the time I got dressed and outside, the Western Wood-Pewee had joined the chorus. Pretty soon the Swainson's Thrush, Song Sparrow, and Winter Wren piped up, too--in that order. It wasn't until I'd been out nearly an hour that I heard a Varied Thrush, and after breakfast I heard Pacific-slope Flycatcher.

While we were eating breakfast, I looked out the window and off in the distance I saw a black animal swimming across the river. I looked at it a long time with my binoculars trying to decide if it was a dog or a bear. Finally I just had to get out my scope and find out, even if my cereal got soggy. Unfortunately I had waited a bit too long and the animal had disappeared from view, so I'll never know for certain. However, this is bear country and the management told us it is very common to see a bear swimming across the Klamath.

After breakfast we drove south to Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park and portions of Redwoods National Park, only about 8 miles away, in search of Roosevelt Elk. There were a few females in the prairie near the campground where we couldn't get sites, but they were too far out for photos. We did see a buck Mule (aka Black-tailed) Deer with two does, which he was definitely herding. They were very close to the road, so Donelda and Jim got out and got a lot of photos. Pretty soon they came even closer to the truck, and I shot them out the window with my 35-70 mm camera.

We continued south a few more miles to just short of Davison Road, and found a herd of female and young (probably) male Elk wandering around some roadside business buildings. Since the businesses cater to tourists, we drove in and Donelda got some pictures. Jim already has wonderful ones in natural settings from a previous trip, so he didn't want these. We then went on to Davison Road and out it a little ways, hoping for better shots. When we went back to the business

parking lots, we discovered the animal were wandering toward the meadows. We must have spent a couple of hours watching and photographing them as they meandered here and there. We ended up with them crossing little Davison Rd. right in front of us and we got all the photos we could ever want. Jim & I joined Donelda this time. I don't know how many Jim shot, but I probably got about a roll (36). Donelda was really pleased to have all the time needed to photograph these animals and she really shot up a storm with her digital camera. Her sister lives in Crescent City, but when she's driven around with her and her family, they had no time or interest in catering to her desire for photos of what to them are ordinary animals, more appropriately shot with guns than cameras.

A small group of Brown-headed Cowbirds was following the elk, sometimes feeding around their feet, sometimes landing on their rumps. The elk didn't tolerate this very long and turned their heads to the rear quickly and chased them off. (Later: Donelda got a wonderful picture that even includes the fleeing cowbird.)

9:30 p.m., Sunday, June 14, 2009
Klamath River RV Park, Klamath, CA

This morning we paid for three more nights in this park and will be here until Wednesday morning.

Yesterday morning, Saturday, June 13, while we were eating breakfast, Jim noticed a flock of Band-tailed Pigeons coming down very low into the trees right in front of his and Donelda's blinds. They were obviously feeding on something. After breakfast we went out and looked closely and discovered they were eating Red Elderberry fruits. This small tree grows at the edge of the forest and is about half as tall as the Red Alders here, maybe 25 feet. Because we were afraid the birds would consume all the fruits ripe here in a few hours and then move on, Jim and Donelda decided to spend the morning in their blinds hoping for a return visit. Donelda got some nice photos, and I think Jim got a few, too. However, Donelda's nicest ones were of a bird that was back in the foliage a little ways and not in Jim's line of sight.

While they were doing this, I had Jim take me a mile-and-a-half west along the road on the south side of the Klamath River and spent the entire morning moseying back to the trailer. He let me off at the other campground on this road, Kamp Klamath, and I decided our place is nicer.

I got lots of Osprey sounds. They seemed to be in the air around the bluff-top all along the road. They were also down by the water and sometimes wading in the edge of the river. (The road is on a bluff-side edge about half-way up the cliff.) I did a lot of recording, but don't recall that I got anything really unusual, but some of the sounds are really nice. I got a possible Red Crossbill, but must plot sonograms to be sure (Later: it doesn't quite match the one on Stokes Western Birds, but this would be a different form.) There was a fair amount of boat traffic on the river, so those sounds were a problem in my recordings.

One feature of the walk was the approach to the old Douglas Memorial Bridge across the Klamath River, built in 1926. It was the last link in the the coast highway to be completed. In 1964 a huge flood (26 inches of warm rain on top of an accumulation of snow) swept down the Klamath, carrying giant trees with it. These backed up behind the bridge and eventually broke it apart. An interpretive sign gives more information. I photographed the sign and recorded its text and will add it at this point:

During Christmas week in 1964 this area was hit with the heaviest rain ever recorded in the region. Torrential storms dumped as much as 24 inches of warm rain over the mountains, melting the snowpack. Swollen creeks and rivers raged through canyons and valleys toward the ocean. Logs

and debris swept away roads, livestock, and structures, including the town of Klamath and the Douglas Memorial Bridge, which had stood here for nearly 40 years. In the aftermath local families with strong ancestral connections to the river and the local fishery rebuilt the townsite upstream on higher ground. [Apparently the townsite was originally right across the bridge on the south side.]

From Del Norte Triplicate newspaper, Crescent City, Mon., Dec. 28, 1964:

Headline: Klamath Floods Leave Hundreds Homeless

People driven from their homes sat in their cars and watched the giant logjam behind the bridge growing larger by the minute. The water rising behind it roared with a fury that mixed with the groan of the logs and trees trying to push their way downstream. The 420-foot center section of the span broke apart under hundreds of tons of pressure as the gigantic raft of redwoods smashed its way west toward the sea.

The flood destroyed the village of Klamath and afterwards it was rebuilt a mile upstream and on higher ground. It's still pretty small. I went into town Friday afternoon to try to find a grocery store and discovered that the only one had closed down. All that was there was a gas station convenience store. Fortunately I was able to get milk, which was what I needed the most.

In the evening Donelda wanted to drive into Crescent City for groceries and to check her phone and email for messages. They don't work in Klamath. We rode in with her and ate dinner in a fish restaurant on the wharf--an old-fashioned one, not the upscale affairs we've been encountering most places. Jim & Donelda had the combination of fried seafood and enjoyed their meals very much. Unfortunately my salmon was overcooked, despite my request to cook it gently. Afterwards we went grocery shopping & I bought enough food for a week. I hadn't expected to remain in Klamath so long and had been really upset by the lack of a grocery store here.

This morning after a leisurely breakfast (Jim's weekly pancakes), we drove about three miles inland from US-101 on tiny SR-169 to the little village of Klamath Glen. Over the levee, which was built after the 1964 flood, is the site of an old development of vacation homes. Today it is quite overgrown with shrubs and small trees, including many exotics, which survived the flood. A huge Eastern Dogwood was in full bloom in one place, and a strange shrubby tree with fine-toothed compound leaves that looked almost like needles had really taken over another area. It had clusters of seed pods and was really strange, but I couldn't find it in my North American tree guide, so it must be an exotic, too. It almost reminded me of a Tamarisk, but it definitely wasn't the kind I'm familiar with.

Our goal was to find the Yellow-breasted Chat and Willow Flycatcher, for which this area is the best place in Del Norte County, according to Alan Barron's excellent bird-finding guide to the county. These birds didn't come right away. Instead the first bird we heard was a warbler-like song that I wasn't entirely sure of. I thought it was a Black-throated Gray Warbler, but really wanted to see it to be sure. There were a lot of them in the area, for we heard their songs wherever we wandered. Finally, after several tries, I got one to respond to playback of its song. It took a song recorded from close-range to get it out in the open. The distant ones, even when amplified, didn't do the job. Once it came out, it stayed in view long enough for Donelda to shoot a few photos, as well as get recordings. The bird was partly hidden in the photos, but still they're pretty good.

We spent most of our time wandering down the "main" road toward the river. But we still hadn't heard our two target species. When we came back toward the levee, I finally got a fairly decent sequence from a chat. The habitat right close to the levee looked the best to me for Willow Flycatcher--semi-open with willows on the edge. There was a paved road that went west parallel to

the levee, so we walked that a ways and finally were rewarded by "fitz-bew," the call of the flycatcher. We walked closer and Donelda played the song from a commercial recording, which she had on her iPod. After several plays, followed by periods of silence, the bird flew right up and perched in a tree right in front of us, so we could see it well. Then it flew a little ways off and called repeatedly. By that time a stiff breeze had gotten up, so the recordings are so-so. We're going to go back there another day and try for better recordings, but these were Donelda's first and she was pretty excited. She didn't try to photograph it.

This afternoon Jim and Donelda sat in their blinds for a long time, hoping for more Band-tailed Pigeon visits, but apparently they stripped the Elderberry trees yesterday. The two photographers were glad they'd stayed in camp that day. Jim spent more time in his blind than Donelda and was rewarded by a Brush Rabbit, which came well out of concealment in the underbrush. He got 6-8 shots, both back views and side ones. That's a subject he has been trying for several places on this trip, but they always flee when you try to stalk them with a camera.

8:45 a.m., Wednesday, June 17, 2009 **Klamath River RV Park**

Monday morning, June 15, we drove out to the Klamath River mouth. About half-way out we stopped at the trailhead parking area near the old bridge that washed out in 1964. The bird-finding guide had recommended that we walk a short distance along the trail that starts there, because it passes a nice pond. This pond was originally created by a lumber company, but has now reverted to a natural community, although it's overrun with Bullfrogs, which outcompete native western amphibians. About 3/4 of the surface was covered with Yellow Waterlilies, the species that is native in the west. There were quite a few Wood Ducks in the clear water areas. The book said Ring-necked Ducks also nest there, but we didn't see any. About the only other species we added to our list for this area was Red-winged Blackbirds—big deal!

We continued on a mile or so farther to the river mouth. From the high blufftop we could see the entire mouth and up the coast to Pt. George near Crescent City. There is a sandspit almost all the way across the mouth, which is maybe half a mile wide here. This is supposed to be one of the best places along the Pacific coast for a variety of birds, but of course this is the time of year when most of them are elsewhere breeding. We saw almost none on land—just a family of Canada Geese. Even the gulls were scarce, just a handful. From the overlook it is possible to walk down to the sandspit, but the scarcity of birds gave us no incentive to do so. Right below the road is a small Yurok Indian cemetery, which looks like any Christian cemetery, even the names of those buried. This whole area is sacred to the Yuroks and there are many sites that have special significance. At the mouth there are two rocks that have names and are featured in Indian legends. I recorded the text of the sign which recounts the story and will insert it here:

THE LEGEND OF OREGOS: SHIFTING SANDSPIT

California's northern coast is rich in American Indian heritage and tradition. The rocks across the water, like many natural and geologic features, were given special names and meanings, and challenge people to act in specific ways at particular locations. Please respect the traditions by not climbing or defacing any rocks.

The Yurok people speak of beginnings in which there were only spirit beings. One day the Creator called all the spirits together, for it was time to complete the world--to populate it with people and to give them trees, rocks, water and food. "Choose what you wish to be," the Creator instructed.

The Oregos spirit wanted to help people. She chose to be the tall rock on the north bank of the Klamath River mouth, the one said to resemble an old woman carrying a burden basket on her back.

She chose this rock so she could summon the fishes that the people dried and smoked for food. Her sister went to dwell on the large rock to the south of the river mouth and their spirits still live there and always will. And so the old women sit there in repose--Oregos to the north and her sister to the south--resting, yet keeping watch over the entrance to the river. One sits with her legs extended out toward the other, while her sister keeps her legs drawn up close underneath. They change positions only if stirred from their rest.

It is said that the shifting of the sandspit can cause unforeseen hazards, misfortune, and tragedy. When people go out on the sandspit at the mouth of the Klamath River, they should have regard for Oregos and her sister, guardians of the river mouth, and be mindful where the people come for food.

From there we drove south along the coast road, which is gravel and one-lane with occasional turnouts. It clings to the edge of the bluff in places and really made me nervous. Fortunately we didn't meet any traffic. We stopped in a couple of turnouts to view flowers and, in one place, an offshore rock with breeding cormorants. It was a classic nesting rock, with a lot of Brandt's on the flat top and a few Pelagics (ca. 4 nests with adults) on a ledge down near the water. Jim and Donelda photographed them, but they were really too far away for very good shots. I can still use them in workshops to illustrate how the two species partition the habitat. [They came out better than Jim had said they would.]

At the south end of the gravel stretch, there is a little spur that goes out to a place where we could view south along the coast for a long ways--lots of small seastacks. The interpretive sign said this area has the strongest earthquakes in the world. I think they mean the entire Pacific Northwest from here on up to Seattle and beyond. I recall reading that the Seattle area has a potential for magnitude 10 quakes.

The gravel road continues on south, but was closed. (I had had enough of it anyway.) From there one can go directly inland to US-101 or angle northwest on Alder Camp Rd. to intersect with the road along the Klamath at the old washed-out bridge. I think this road is probably a part of the old US-101, for it is so nicely and evenly graded. It was all downhill from there to the river and entirely through impressive tall forest.

That afternoon the sun actually came out for the first time in days. It's been overcast most of the time with temperatures in the 50s to maybe the low 60s for a short time every day, so I've not bothered to mention the weather in these accounts. Anyway, it was such a nice afternoon, that I actually got my chair out and sat outdoors for a few hours.

I was careful to keep away from Jim's and Donelda's blinds. The Band-tailed Pigeons are very easily spooked and we were hoping they'd come back for more Red Elderberry fruits. I can't remember if any did, but Swainson's Thrush and Hairy Woodpecker were regular customers. Donelda found a Hairy Woodpecker nest hole not far away. It was pretty high for very good photos, though. She also found a lower Chestnut-backed Chickadee nest, and Jim spent some time photographing it and was happy with what he got.

Yesterday morning, Tuesday, June 16, we went back to the old Klamath Glen subdivision. This time we drove directly to the place where we'd found the Willow Flycatcher late in the morning on Sunday--after the breeze got up. This time it was nice and calm and we got excellent recordings. There were an amazing number of other birds right in that area, so I got some wonderful mixtures of sounds--will get the full list when I listen to the tapes, but there must have been at least a dozen species. My aural birding students will definitely get to hear portions of what I got in some future workshops. [Full list of birds recorded from about 100 ft of road: American Robin, Brown-headed Cowbird, Steller's Jay, Allen's Hummingbird, Swainson's Thrush, Common Raven, Willow Flycatcher,

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Wrentit, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Purple Finch, Black-throated Gray Warbler, American Goldfinch.]

We played back a portion of my Willow Flycatcher recording and Donelda got a few photos. They were against a bright sky, so she'll have to fix them up with Photoshop, a process for which she loves to use the techie term, "crunch."

It was only 10:00 when we finished there, so we decided to have Jim take us to the uphill end of Alder Camp Road through the forest that we drove the day before, the one that ended up at the old bridge. As we drove southwestward on the road, we measured the mileage to be 1.9 miles, a reasonable walk, especially when it's all downhill. The only hazard was that it was pretty narrow and nearly shoulderless in spots. A occasional two-trailer gravel truck came by, greatly exceeding the 35-mph speed limit, despite the curves. They were always travelling in the same direction, so we figured they must be going in another way—or else there were an awful lot of trucks.

My goal was to improve my Varied Thrush song recordings and to get some more calls. The recording conditions were outstanding and I got lots of nice sounds. Donelda played some songs and calls on her I-Pod and brought a bird or two in closer. Occasionally they did a shorter, rougher sound, which I think is a call. They never did give the rough "check" call that was on her I-Pod and which I recorded once years ago.

We also got a scold from a Winter Wren--sounded like a rapid series of its "chimp" calls, which are usually given singly or doubly. The rest of what we recorded was just better versions of the usual woodland birds here—Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, Winter Wren songs, Common Raven, etc.

We had told Jim it might take us until 1:00 to walk the road; in fact, it took us an hour to do the first half-mile because of the wonderful Varied Thrushes. We knew we could radio Jim from the old bridge, because I had done it before. But just as we pulled around the last bend in the road at 12:30, around the corner came that white Suburban with the ladder on the roof. Perfect timing, but I suspect Jim was just getting hungry and tired of eating peanuts and cookies.

Speaking of the ladder on the roof, Jim carries it so he can get up on the roof of the trailer if he needs to fix anything. However, it sometimes makes people think it's some sort of official vehicle. When we were at one of the picnic areas in Humboldt Redwoods State Park a few days ago, some people came up and asked us if they had to pay to look around there since they'd camped in a nearby state campground the night before. We had no idea and wondered why they thought we'd know. We directed them to a park employee who was cleaning the restrooms nearby. The woman then told us she had thought we were park employees because of our ladder. We've decided we ought to get some sort of cryptic, hard-to-read, emblem to put on the door of the truck to make us look even more official. It might deter break-ins. We've been pretty lucky, and also very careful, and have never had one, but there's always the possibility.

Last night after dinner, Donelda and I drove up the Alder Camp Road about a half-mile to where there was a wide pull-off and listened for owls. We were especially hoping for a Spotted, but we heard nothing. We tried playing Northern Saw-whet and Northern Pygmy, but got no response. Because Spotted is so endangered, we refrained from playing that.

After spending an hour there, we decided to listen a while in the parking area by the old bridge. When we turned off the engine, we could hear distant human sounds. At first, we thought it was singing. Then it seemed as though it might be Indian chants. But when I aimed my microphone out the window, I realized it was an old-fashioned revival service and we were hearing the preacher, who was really pumped up with Jesus by then. I had to record a little bit of it for Jim. It was a pretty bad recording because of the river and the distance, but he instantly recognized it for what it was when I played it for him this morning. Whenever we're in the deep south on Sunday morning, he always has

to tune in the radio and listen to those Pentecostal sermons. Years ago in western Virginia near the Cumberland Gap, while I was visiting a museum he didn't think sounded interesting, he recorded a long piece of this type of wild, breathless sermonizing--by a woman preacher. He actually still had the tape in the truck and knew where to find it and played a bit of it for Donelda this morning. Donelda says that a lot of people from Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, etc., settled here in the 1930s. Her brother-in-law was from one of those families, as was an old man we met in Klamath Glen on Sunday. So it stands to reason that the Old Time Religion is still strong in this area.

This morning, Wednesday, June 17, I decided I couldn't stand Toby's aroma any longer. He must have rolled in something on the grass a couple of days ago. So I gave him a bath. (I had been going to wait a few days, so I'd only have to give him one more before Linda Gray grooms him around July 4.) I also knew I needed to update this diary. It's now almost 10:00.

Donelda carries a canoe atop her truck, so she decided to have Jim take her up to Klamath Glen three miles away (by road). There she put her canoe in the water and is now floating down the Klamath, which is pretty placid here near the mouth. She'll be able to haul it out of the water right at our campground. . . In fact, I see her walking back to the trailers right now. Must go out and find out all about it. . . . She said it went pretty fast and she always tried to stay on the slow-current sides of the curves to make it last longer. All the birds she saw were pretty wary, but she did see a Spotted Sandpiper and a merganser species, but both fled when they were far away.

We were going to leave today, but Jim just reported that the Band-tailed Pigeons have finally discovered his feeder log. I'm in no hurry to leave. I love this place. It's not often that we have all the advantages of being in the wild and all the comforts of full hookups back in the trailer. From the trailer, depending on where I'm sitting, I can either look far down the river or at the tall forest behind the trailer with Jim's and Donelda's feeding stations at the edge.

4:30 p.m., Friday, June 19, 2009 **Redwood RV Park, N of Crescent City, CA**

Yesterday morning, Thursday, June 18, the Band-tails really justified our decision to stay one more night in Klamath. They came in repeatedly and in numbers, sometimes feeding on Jim's log, other times eating the newly ripened Red Elderberries. I could see his flash going off many times. He also got more shots of the Swainson's Thrush.

We left around 11:00 and drove the slow 20 miles to Crescent City, made even longer by a long flagger wait to get through a one-way construction zone. We're in an RV park that we've stayed in before, which is four miles north of town on US-101. It's under new ownership and was formerly called the Ramblin' Rose RV Park, because it has a huge red-barn type building out front where they used to have country music concerts. The building is no longer used & is for rent/sale or something. The park has been spruced up considerably, but one of the "improvements" was to install huge sodium-vapor "security" lights everywhere. Our bedroom was flooded with light last evening and I had to put up the sheets of black fabric that I carry for that purpose. I couldn't block the light from the vent, though, because we got new vent covers and they don't have the snaps that we use to attach the special curtains I made for them. Donelda's situation was even worse. The park is very pretty, with tall redwoods and native ferns, etc., underneath. Not too many birds, though.

Last evening we went out to dinner at a different fish place from last time. It was somewhat better than last week's. Donelda's sister, Linda, who lives here in Crescent City, went with us. We brought home enough fish for tonight's meal--and probably tomorrow's lunch, too. The take-home is especially loaded with oysters, which only Jim likes--and he doesn't like them that well! [He got pretty tired of oysters by the time he ate the last one a couple of days later.]

When Donelda was here in April, she went out before dawn in the morning to listen for Marbled Murrelets in Jedediah Smith SP, along the Smith River northeast of town. This morning we tried to repeat the experience. Unfortunately we heard no birds, but before daybreak there was a constant call from the treetops, which we recorded. Will have to try to figure out what it might be. It stopped about the time the daytime birds started singing. [I was unable to identify the sound.]

We were back at the trailers by 6:00 and had breakfast. Then Donelda drove us around some of the farmland in the Smith River floodplain a little ways north of our RV park. A large organic farming enterprise, Alexandre's, farms there and allows native plants to grow along the and roadsides. Some of these plants are quite large, and the area has become a popular birding spot for Del Norte County birders. In fact, Alan Barron, who wrote the bird-finding guide to the area, drove up while we were stopped at one place. Donelda knew him because she had hired him for a day of birding when she was here in April, so she picked his brain about other places to go. Unfortunately our experience was only so-so, partly because of the time of year, but mostly because a cold front was passing and it was quite blustery (16 mph with gusts to 23 mph. I was able to access weather.com via the first WiFi we've had on this trip.). We did hear a few Lazuli Buntings, the first for me on this trip.

Afterwards, we drove on a little farther north to the mouth of the Smith River. Donelda had never been there, but I remembered it was an interesting place. It was very interesting today. As soon as we drove up to the little parking area at the end of the road, we saw a huge array of what looked like boulders at the end of the sandspit on the opposite side of the river opening. Closer inspection revealed that the forms nearest the water were Harbor Seals, while those farther up on the sand were Brown Pelicans--several hundred of each. All were hunkered down because of the fierce wind coming off the ocean. There was also a lot of feeding going on in the mouth of the river and even more in the ocean right offshore. Western and Heermann's Gulls were there, but also cormorants, a Red-throated Loon, several Common Murres in various stages of molt, and even a couple of Marbled Murrelets that were in mostly non-breeding, or perhaps juvenal, plumage. They were pretty far out and, being only about nine inches long, pretty hard to see, even with Donelda's good scope.

The Marbled Murrelets were supposed to be easier to see from Pelican State Beach just south of the Oregon border. We went up there, but didn't see any. The choppy ocean made it difficult to see much, though.

5:30 p.m., Monday, June 22, 2009

Aspen Point USFS Cpgd., Lake of the Woods, northwest of Klamath Falls, OR

Saturday, June 20, we drove the Crescent City shoreline from Pt. St. George to the harbor area, making many stops. It was a cold, blustery day, with winds of 23 mph, gusting to 37 mph per weather.com, which I checked in the afternoon. I've always loved the drive, but today was only so-so, partly because of the wind and partly because it's the time of year when the shorebirds are mainly away. We did see one small group, consisting of one Whimbrel and three Marbled Godwits.

We carefully scoped Castle Rock for the single pair of Tufted Puffins, which is all that remains of a small breeding colony there. This is the southernmost breeding place for that species, and some of the areas farther north, e.g., Bandon, OR, are no longer active at all. Unfortunately, we didn't see a bird, and Donelda knew where to look on the island. I do recall seeing one or more there years ago, either on the rock or on the water nearby; I can't recall which. There was a huge colony of Common Murres on the island and also a great many Brown Pelicans, which I don't think are nesting there. It was really hard to hold the scope steady in the gale, but we placed the Suburban cross-ways to the wind, and placed the scope on the lee side.

At one point, I thought I heard a "too too-too too too-too . . ." call, but told myself the Eurasian Collared-Dove couldn't be this far up the coast; it had to be just a poorly heard Mourning Dove, partially drowned out by the wind. However, a minute or so later, a E. Collared-Dove landed on a low fence not far away from me. What will be the limit of the range expansion of this bird?

A small group of Brant were in the shallow water of the harbor area. What are they doing there this time of year?

Yesterday, Sunday, June 21, Donelda left us to go north to visit her relatives in Fort St. John, BC. We really are a congenial travelling trio, and Jim and I were sorry to see her go, but I didn't try to stop her. She'll find lots of wonderful birds there, for she'll be on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, where lots of eastern birds breed. I hope she'll have time to do some birding in between visits with her aunts and cousins. [It turned out to be a cold, blustery summer, so her birding was a disappointment, but she enjoyed her aunts, cousins, etc. One cousin even built her a nice desk and some book shelves for her trailer.]

We reluctantly left the coast and headed inland. I had checked the ten-day weather forecast for Klamath Falls for possible heat waves, and found the highs are not forecast to get above the low 80s, so we decided to finish up our trip with a change of scene. After looking at my campground literature, I decided Lake of the Woods in southern Oregon sounded nice. The area is heavily forested--mainly Douglas-Fir, with a scattering of Western White Pine, Mountain Hemlock, etc. It has three campgrounds, two USFS and one a commercial resort with RV sites. We looked them all over and eliminated the resort because the sites are too close together and Sunset Campground because it looks overused and has almost no understory of shrubs. Aspen Point seemed nicest and we selected site number 8 because it's on the north side of a small opening in the forest. It's pretty narrow and somewhat overgrown at the opening, but with Jim's expert direction, which I followed implicitly, I managed to back us into the site. Today we had lots of sunlight to recharge our solar panels, so it looks as though we can stay here as long as we want to.

After we got into our site, it was wider than it had been at its narrow entrance. Jim was able to set up his water drip and feeding log where we can easily view them from the trailer, but it can't be seen from the campground road at all. The understory here is about five feet high and consists almost entirely of Bush Chinkapin, as I discovered this afternoon when I finally got around to thinking about it. That is considered a common understory plant in some forested areas in California, but I had trouble finding much when I was preparing for my Western Mountains and their Birds workshop a decade ago. I finally got photos of a few plants in Mt. Lassen National Park and made do with that. Now I really can see how important a plant it is in some places. I shots lots of photos of it this afternoon and will use them when I redo that workshop in a year or so.

We had really high hopes for the birds here, but so far their visits have been widely spaced. We've had two visits from a family of Gray Jays (2 juveniles and one parent). The juvies love to bathe, as do all young corvids, as we've discovered on this trip. The parent just drank a little water and nibbled a little food. Jim was not sitting outside for either visit. The other two species were Steller's Jay and Dark-eyed Junco. I've heard Hermit Warblers and Golden-crowned Kinglets in the treetops. It seems like a good place for Hammond's Flycatcher, but so far I've not found one.

Yesterday was bitterly cold with a little rain as we drove here. It was around 50% and clearing when we arrived and got down to 32° last night. We used our down comforters for the first time on the trip. Today was somewhat warmer, with a high of around 60°.

This morning we ate a somewhat late breakfast. Jim's weekly pancakes were especially nice and light because of the 5000 foot elevation here.

Right outside the entrance of the campground is Great Meadow, a very large and very beautiful wet meadow. After breakfast I walked back along the road past it and found a few more species. A Wilson's Snipe was on a little high place in the meadow, where it probably has a nest. It called its "pip pip pip..." alarm calls. I could also hear one or two birds winnowing (feather sound during display flight). Given the expanse of the meadow, it's surprising there aren't more. I also recorded Warbling Vireo and a few other species. On my way back to the campsite, I discovered a trail that sets out right beside site 7 and is called the Great Meadow trail. It looked as though it would skirt the edge of the meadow, so I decided to walk it a ways. It's an excellent trail--nice and wide and covered with fine gravel--seems to be wheelchair accessible. Most of the way it was through forest and pretty quiet, but occasionally it would come out to the edge of the meadow. It was hard to turn around on such a wonderful trail. Pretty soon I came to a junction with a mileage sign and I discovered it was a mile back to the campground and only 3/4 of a mile ahead to the "trailhead." I had seen a large parking area with restrooms, etc., in the distance across the meadow earlier and figured it must be the trailhead. I called Jim to be sure he could hear me on the radio (he could) and asked him to pick me up at the trailhead in an hour, if I didn't call him sooner. That last 3/4 mile was the birdiest part of the trail. Whether it was the habitat or the fact that it was finally warming up I don't know. I even flushed up a Pileated Woodpecker from a downed log it was apparently foraging on. Great Meadow was drained in the 1920s and they even had plans for a golf course and baseball fields there in the 1930s and 1940s! (Ugh!) It was used for a time as an airstrip. Fortunately people came to their senses and the habitat was restored starting in 1990. The dormant seeds sprouted, and it's a beautiful wildlife habitat today. I recorded the text of the signboard describing all of this and will insert it here:

GREAT MEADOW

Many centuries ago this area would have been underwater year-round--a part of Lake of the Woods--and as recently as the 1920s (before drainage ditches were dug), the lake overflowed during wet years and covered the meadow to a shallow depth.

Long before the first American explorers saw this place in the 1840s to the 1850s, the Indian peoples, such as the Klamath, who lived in villages along the shores of Upper Klamath Lake, and the Takelma, inhabited the Rogue Valley to the west and knew about this moist opening. Very possibly they dug the roots of important edible plants, Blue Camas, Yampah, and others, from the meadow, while on hunting expeditions into the nearby forest.

In September of 1888 Judge John Waldo, famous Oregon outdoorsman, climbed to the top of Mt. McLoughlin for a vista to the south. He remarked on the summit's fine view of Lake of the Woods "with a yellow strip of prairie of several hundred acres at its north end." The next day he camped near the prairie while his horses grazed on its natural hay field. Through the late 1800s Great Meadow provided welcome feed for the livestock of travelers on the original Ashland to Klamath Basin wagon road located just east of here.

By 1924, as both the Medford and Klamath Falls areas prospered, Lake of the Woods' forested shoreline was becoming ringed with summer homes, campgrounds, and a resort. That year some people suggested that with proper draining, Great Meadow would make an excellent golf course. Baseball diamonds and other athletic facilities were also on the drawing board. Although the golf course and ball fields never materialized, drainage ditches did permit the meadow to serve as a landing field for small aircraft from the late 1930s to the late 1960s. Interestingly, the lake itself was designated an emergency landing field for Navy seaplane training flights during World War II. At one time before the airfield was closed, over 20 aircraft were parked on the meadow.

This 500-acre level opening, looking from the air like a jewel within a rugged forested setting, continued to draw visitors. The sounds of winter sports, such as cross-country skiing, dog-sled racing, and snowmobiling, have echoed across the meadow for several decades now. Regional

snowmobile races held here during the 1970s helped make the Great Meadow an important winter destination for residents of southern Oregon, something it remains today.

After years of artificial drainage, a low earthen dam constructed by the Forest Service returned seasonal flooding to Great Meadow in the spring of 1990, creating expanded wildlife habitat. Long-dormant seeds of plants dependent on prolonged wet conditions quickly sprang to life. Now the meadow becomes a palette of changing colors and textures as it proceeds from a wet marsh to a dry meadow in the course of a year. As a result of the change, the area has become richer in animal and plant species. A short trip around the meadow on the High Lakes Trail provides opportunities for spotting geese, ducks, eagles, raccoons, and other wildlife, even an occasional Sandhill Crane.

This campground has everything we need. A water faucet isn't far away and Jim will carry some water to refill our tank tomorrow. He was able to purchase propane at the resort campground close by, so we can stay here as long as we want. It all depends on whether the birds pick up on our feeding station (and whether Jim can withstand the mosquitos). Certainly the squirrels have. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels and Townsend's Chipmunks are regular customers.

4:30 p.m., Friday, June 26, 2009

State Line Campground, in California south of Merrill, OR

Tuesday, June 23, I decided to explore another portion of the good trail. To get there I had to walk through the day-use portion of the campground. I had found a single Evening Grosbeak the evening before when I took Toby for a walk, but could not relocate it.

From the boat-launch I could look along the lakeshore and see the Aspen Point for which this campground is named. It contains a huge, ancient Aspen plus a few of its "clones." I took some photos of it then and went back in the afternoon for more when the light was better.

The trail went between the lake and the meadow through a swampy section of forest--mostly Lodgepole Pines here. The trail itself was high and dry on a raised dike. A bridge crossed the exit from the lake. Since the lake only overflows while the snow is melting in the mountains, the streambed was rather diffuse and the water flowed through tall grasses. Needless to say, this area was really thick with mosquitos. I smeared myself with DEET and kept my jacket and gloves on, but they still made a few "hits." I wasn't tempted to stop much and record, because then they really gathered. It was a beautiful walk, though. After about half a mile it ascended to more of a mix of Lodgepole Pines and Douglas-Fir and had far fewer birds.

Among the birds in the wet forest were a few Swainson's Thrushes. We'd had these in abundance along the coast, but they aren't common here. I heard or saw a few Yellow-rumped Warblers, but mostly found Hermits; there were a lot of them.

The final portion of the trail was rather close to the main highway and pretty noisy. The "easy" part of it ended at a Visitors Center right beside the highway, which has apparently been closed for a number of years. It's a very attractive building. Too bad they had to close it. I decided I really didn't want to brave the mosquitos and walk back. By then it was pretty warm and I'd have had to shed some of my protective clothing and smear on more DEET. So I called Jim on the radio and had him come and pick me up. The little radios (called "Cobra") we bought at Wal-Mart are really nice. What a relief to finally have some we like. We've certainly wasted a lot of money on unsatisfactory versions of those things over the years. The Cobras are so nice that we invested in a second pair when we were in Crescent City so Donelda could have one to use, too.

I sat inside the rest of the day--too many mosquitos to get out my chair.

Wednesday morning, June 24, Jim spent a couple more hours in his blind and was rewarded with one more Gray Jay session. Then we drove in to Klamath Falls. I've always gotten lost in that city and usually failed to find the main shopping area. This time we drove north on US-97 and got off where a sign said "Visitors Center." It turned out to be in a museum with a very small parking lot--impossible with the trailer. So we parked out front where it said "No Parking," and I walked in. The attendant at the desk said parking there was no problem. That was a good thing, for she hunted high and low for my requested map of the city and finally gave up. She then picked up an advertising brochure with sort of a map and showed me where the business street was. I'd have never found it on my own. We decided on Wal-Mart because it had both a pharmacy and a grocery store. After a long wait for the prescriptions, it turned out they only had one of them. The other they had in 20-mg doses and without doctor's OK wouldn't release it to me and let me split the pills into 5-mg amounts, as the pharmacist in Sebastopol the previous month had. Apparently 5 mg is an unusually small dose of this product. I must be sure my doctor writes on the form that it's OK next time I take a trip. To top it off, they tried to make Jim pay the full amount for the prescription, when every other Wal-Mart has had a record of my insurance in its computer. Finally they reluctantly used his prescription card (same number) and found my name and let him have it for \$25 co-pay. Of course, he could have trudged back out to the trailer on the outskirts of the hot parking lot for my card, but didn't want to do that yet again.

We ate lunch in the hot trailer while waiting for the prescriptions and finally got on the road at around 2:00. Our destination was an RV Park where we've stayed many times over the years whenever we've visited Lower Klamath and Tule Lake NWRs. It apparently doesn't meet the Trailer Life standards and is not listed, so we always wonder if it's still in business. We were happy to find it was. Most of the residents seem to be long-term types, but only one or two trailers had a lot of junk beside them. Jim said the rest rooms were nicely designed and very clean. It's only \$19 a night for full hookups, when we've been paying \$32-38 almost everywhere else. The grounds-keeper said the manager would come around and collect, but he when hadn't come by the second afternoon, Jim sought him out and had to insist he take the full \$57 for three nights. He wanted to charge us only \$50 because he didn't have change, but Jim fished deep in his pockets and came up with the right amount. We were a bit uneasy by the unkempt appearance of some of the residents, but they seem to be OK. Certainly they're nice and quiet. The only noisy resident is our Toby, who wants to bark all the time at the well-behaved dog tied up outside the next unit, not to mention the manager's(?) cat.

The sites are grassy and there are a number of trees and shrubs. Across the Stateline Highway is agricultural land in Oregon. (The RV park is in California.) I've tallied 15 bird species that are typically found around farm buildings--species such as Bullock's Oriole, Western Kingbird, Cliff and Barn Swallows, Red-tailed Hawk. Common Nighthawks "peent" by at dusk.

Yesterday morning, Thurs., June 25, we got an early start and headed for the tour road at Lower Klamath NWR; the entrance is only about 5 miles away on a 65-mph road. The last time we were here, the place was pretty disappointing, but this time the water issues have been settled and the agricultural interests have had to give up some of their water to flood the wildlife refuge to a reasonable level. (This entire valley used to be a marsh, but 80% of it was drained for agriculture. Why shouldn't the birds get their share!?) I recall reading about it; the settlement also involved providing more water for the Klamath River and its salmon fishery.

We found the place alive with birds. The first hour or two I drove along a roadside ditch, where Gadwall and Cinnamon Teal families were everywhere. Jim shot countless photos of them and other subjects from the truck window (3+ rolls of everything by the end of the day). The setting was

beautiful: green vegetation on the bank, still water with reflections, etc. Here and there a White-faced Ibis was on the bank and the light was just right to show all its green and bronze iridescence.

On the northbound portion of the loop we found a huge Tricolored Blackbird colony, whose maximum density portion was at least a half-mile long, with stragglers extending another half mile. They were nesting in Poison Hemlock on the far side of a narrow ditch, with a few on the near side. I got wonderful recordings. (This has really been a Tricolored Blackbird trip!) The only drawback was that there were a few noisy Yellow-headed Blackbirds nesting in clumps of Bullrush in the pond on the opposite side of the road. Jim shot a few frames of the Tricolors, but was more interested in the White-faced Ibis, which were flying across the road in small groups. [He didn't shoot more Tricolors because he thought he'd gotten them well down in Kern Co., but those rolls went missing.]

It was after noon when we got back to the trailer, but we quickly wrote up our morning's adventures to email to a couple of people we've been corresponding with, then drove the 2.5 (?) miles to Merrill, had lunch in the little cafe there and sent our emails at the gas station's phone booth.

Late in the afternoon we drove back to the refuge and this time drove out to where a notice on the bulletin board had said where there were nesting Tricolored Blackbirds and Bank Swallows. We found no Tricolored Blackbirds where the notice said they were and found it strange they had mentioned them there when they're thick right along the main tour route. However, we did find the Bank Swallows nesting in the walls of the quarry where refuge employees apparently get gravel for road upkeep. It's a pretty large colony of 100-200 birds, maybe more, but was east-facing. Also the wind was blowing, so recording was out. Definitely a job for the next morning.

Just before we arrived at the Bank Swallow colony we drove a mile or two of road that was thick with American Avocets and their chicks in the damp roadside ditch. Jim took a lot of photos of them. I did a little recording, for I discovered they occasionally do a clipped version of their usual "kleep" call when they are especially alarmed, as they were when Jim was photographing them.

During both our morning and afternoon outings we encountered vehicles in only one place--a stretch of refuge road that was being graded. No tourist or refuge-management vehicles were to be seen. We had the place to ourselves, but I couldn't help but wonder how long it would take for someone to discover us at the Bank Swallow colony if our truck should fail to start. Once it did--until Jim discovered he hadn't shifted it to "park."

This morning we returned to the refuge. We drove past the area where Jim found all the duck families yesterday and were surprised to discover that there were very few. Later in the morning we discovered a Prairie Falcon perched in a dead tree not far away and wondered if it could have scared the ducks into the vegetation, but we really don't know the reason. We were just thankful for yesterday.

The Bank Swallow colony was in full swing and I did a lot of recording. I discovered that when I stood beside it, the birds were reluctant to come in, so we drove the truck right up to it and I recorded from the open window and got lots of wonderful sound. This is the first Bank Swallow colony I've ever encountered that was not right beside a busy highway. Recording conditions were excellent here--just an occasional distant sound of a crop-sprayer airplane. The quarry was around a slight bend from the sounds of marsh birds--just a Red-winged Blackbird once in a while.

I left Jim trying to photograph the Bank Swallows and walked back along the road. Later he said it was impossible; they pop in and out so fast and have their backs to the camera. We don't know how other photographers get the great shots that appear in publications. [He did get some nice shots of a fledgling, but we're still without good adults. I think he should have set up his blind or pulled the truck up really close or . . . Anyway, I was disappointed.]

I hadn't walked very far when I was mobbed by American Avocets. They flew all around my head, screaming their deafening "kleep" calls. I saw no chicks in this portion and heard none of the clipped calls of yesterday. Occasionally a White-faced Ibis would join the group of birds circling me and I got some recordings with their "uh-ick" calls in them, too. But I was happy when Jim came to pick me up, for I couldn't record anything else very well with those Avocets calling constantly.

A bit farther back along the road, I got a few poor [actually not as bad as I remembered] Black-crowned Night-Heron alarm calls as they flew off. I really need sounds from that bird. We're going back to the refuge around 8:00 tonight and try to get them in the period before and after sunset.

Home Sunday, July 12, 2009

I'm long overdue writing up the final days of our trip--mainly because they weren't very interesting.

On Friday evening, June 26, we returned to Lower Klamath just before sunset. I walked the refuge road not far from the entrance for about an hour trying to get Black-crowned Night-Heron sounds. I saw lots of them fly out of the marsh, but most were silent. I did get one sequence, but it has all sorts of other marsh birds in it, too, especially Red-winged Blackbird, Song Sparrow, and Common Yellowthroat. Oh yes, it also has mosquitos. They were super-thick in the evening, so I had to take a shower before going to bed to get all the DEET off.

On Saturday, June 27, we decided we really should check out Tule Lake NWR, which is no farther from the State Line Campground than Lower Klamath, but in the opposite direction, east. We got there quite early (maybe 7:00 am) because the day promised to be warm. We went first to the headquarters area, where there is a small visitors center, but it didn't open until 9:00. Usually we don't linger in that area, and I'm always sorry afterwards, for that's where there are the most land birds, which tend to quiet down by mid-day.

Right behind the center is the tall, sheer, bluff of Sheepy Ridge (named for sheep that haven't been there for decades; reintroduction attempts failed). An enormous colony of Cliff Swallows was nesting there, with their nests placed under even the tiniest of overhangs. Once in a while a Red-tailed Hawk would let out a single scream (never could see the bird) and the swallows would all fly out and around for a minute or so, then return to their more random activity. It was really an impressive sight. Unfortunately, it was all too high for photos.

After that we walked across the road and along a little ditch with marsh and riparian vegetation along it. A Willow Flycatcher was calling all the time, but Jim was unable to connect for a photo. (He really doesn't need that bird, for he has some excellent ones taken out our second story window at home, as well as other places.) I walked a portion of the marsh nature trail, but it was inactive this year. The cattails had gotten too thick and they'd plowed them up and were in the process of restoring the place to a more productive marsh. Marshes become overgrown and convert to meadows if they don't get swept out every few years, either by a natural or a man-induced process.

Then we decided to drive the auto tour route. The impoundments at Tule Lake are much larger than those at Lower Klamath, where many of the roads go beside fairly narrow channels. This made the birds very far away. Furthermore, more of these wetlands seem to be kept wet only in the winter when the waterfowl are present. We found them mostly dried up with lots of cracked mud and a little standing water far away. Nothing was recordable or photographable. So it was a disappointment. We got back to the trailer pretty early and did little of interest the rest of the day.

I discovered it was around 850-900 miles home, so planned for us to spend about three days enroute. The first night, Sunday, June 28, I selected a place only about 275 miles away because I didn't want to have to contend with the Sacramento area. It was Campers Inn in Dunnigan, Yolo Co. The access road was really rough, but we liked the RV Park. The heat had finally hit us with a vengeance and the temperature was 110° for several hours in the afternoon. We were happy that most of the campsites had full shade. Even so, it took several hours to get the trailer cooled down to 85° and it was still 90° outside when I went to bed around 10:00. We ran the air-conditioner all night, but found the temperature in the upper 60s when we awoke, so could have turned it off.

Monday was just as hot and it was 111° when we completed the 325-mile drive to Buena Vista Recreation Area in Kern Co., where we had spent several days earlier in the trip. We hadn't anticipated any problem getting a shady site on a Monday night, but unfortunately summer had started and the place was nearly full. They told us of a couple of sites which their information sheet said were shady and let us go look at them. We found that there was shade over the picnic tables, but not over the sites. Furthermore they were going to stay sunny until the sun went down. Jim made the decision I hoped he would, and that was to drive the rest of the way home. We had stopped for lunch (eaten in air-conditioned truck because of Toby) near Buttonwillow and Jim had ordered a large Coke at Carl's Jr, not realizing that "large" means "gargantuan." Now we were glad he had, for all that caffeine took him home nicely. We stopped along the road just before we got back to I-5 to use the bathroom in the trailer and were good for the rest of the way home.

The temperature went down gradually as we ascended the Grapevine, but was still pretty hot. I turned off the rear air-conditioner just to be on the safe side, but Jim said our Suburban's temperature gauge didn't budge from the correct temperature, even pulling the trailer up that steep grade. I expected heat again after we got across the mountains, but even in the inland valleys it was only 85° and when we got home, it was in the low 70s with that wonderful sea breeze. How glad we were that we had finished the drive. We got home around 5:30 and were pleasantly surprised at how little traffic we had encountered. We did have about 5 miles of slow-and-go on I-405 just south of Wilshire Blvd., but it turned out to be an accident, not rush-hour traffic.

When we got home and opened the trailer, we found two souvenirs of the Central Valley. First, it was really hot! Second, it had dozens of flies buzzing around. We hadn't realized it at the time, but our bathroom stop just before we got to the freeway had been beside a cattle feed-lot and we hadn't bothered to close the door of the trailer for the couple of minutes it took us to use the facilities. We opened all the windows and doors, and that cooled it off pretty fast, but it took several days to get rid of all those flies.