

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

From a well-attended meeting in the Imperial Valley in August 1997, the Western Field Ornithologists will shift gears climatically and biogeographically to meet 1-4 October 1998 in Arcata, Humboldt County, California. Ron LeValley is heading up the local committee, and Dave Shuford is putting together the scientific program. I'm sure those who attended the Imperial Valley meeting will join me in thanking Roger Higson and those who assisted him in hosting a unique and productive WFO meeting. At the 1997 meeting three WFO Directors whose terms had expired were re-elected: Dan Gibson, Tim Manolis, and Dave Shuford; Lucie Clark was elected by the Directors to be the new Recording Secretary. We also agreed to form more aggressive and effective committees to take care of WFO business and strive to implement new initiatives. In an attempt to attract students of ornithology to the organization, we have initiated a student membership rate. We are finalizing plans to hold our 1999 meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, and we have been invited to meet along the Kern River in Kernville, California, for WFO's 30th birthday in 2000.

Limited space here allows me to list only two of the various initiatives of the directors, officers, and other active participants of WFO. Most importantly, WFO's web site is now up and running; the URL for this site, which doubles as the site for the California Bird Records Committee, is [www.wfo-cbrc.org](http://www.wfo-cbrc.org). Many thanks to Peter LaTourrette, David Blue, and Joe Morlan for their hard work on this site. I also want to mention that a new Publications Committee, in tandem with Phil Unitt and his tremendous editorial team, is working hard to initiate a series of WFO Monographs, with plans, for example, for a monograph on the birds of the Salton Sea to follow in part from a series of excellent presentations on that topic at our 1997 meeting.

Our organization has always had an interest in the Salton Sea; the first two volumes of *California Birds* included three papers dealing, at least in part, with the Sea, and there have been many more since. The WFO Directors, simultaneously heartened and concerned by the current political interest in the future of the Sea, have adopted the resolution below; the American Ornithologists' Union and other major ornithological societies followed suit by adopting a similar resolution, based upon ours, at the April 1998 North American Ornithological Conference.

### RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE SALTON SEA AS SIGNIFICANT WILDLIFE HABITAT

WHEREAS the Salton Sea, the third largest interior saline lake in North America, formed by accidental water diversions from the Colorado River into southeastern California in 1905-6 and presently maintained by inflows of water imported for agricultural purposes, agricultural runoff, and freshwater river flows, has long been recognized as providing significant wetland habitat for a highly diverse array of migratory and breeding waterbird populations, and

WHEREAS recent surveys have revealed populations of up to 1.5 million Eared Grebes in midwinter (Jehl 1988), up to half of California's wintering White-faced Ibis (Shuford et al. 1996), and regional significance as an integral component of the Pacific Flyway for tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds (Page et al. 1992), waterfowl, and American White Pelicans, as well as significant breeding colonies of Double-crested Cormorants and Caspian Terns (K. Molina unpubl. data), nearly 40% of the nesting Black Skimmers (Collins and Garrett 1996), and by far the larger of only two breeding populations of Gull-billed Terns in western North America (Parnell et al. 1995), and

WHEREAS the Salton Sea has been documented to be of significant value as avian habitat from the time of its formation (for example, see early studies reported by Grinnell 1908, Dawson 1923, Pemberton 1927, Miller and van Rossem 1929), and

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has retained this significance in the subsequent nine decades, with the Sea and its surrounding agricultural lands remaining a renowned birdwatching locality of national significance with over 350 species recorded and immense numbers of breeding, migrant, and wintering birds, in addition to unique post-breeding use by a variety of subtropical waterbirds, and

WHEREAS the Salton Sea represents a complex mosaic of habitats and land-use types, from saline lake waters to brackish and freshwater deltas resulting from both natural and imported (agricultural) water sources, and of state and federal wildlife refuges, agricultural areas, and geothermal developments, all with equally complex interactions and often competing interests, and

WHEREAS the state of California and surrounding regions have experienced significant losses of wetlands (Johnson and Jehl 1994), including coastal wetlands, interior wetlands (most notably the Colorado River delta and Tulare Lake basin), and interior saline lakes such as Owens Lake (Jehl 1994), making the Salton Sea, despite its "artificial" genesis, especially unique and important as *de facto* mitigation on a regional if not continental scale, and

WHEREAS significant colonies of ground-nesting colonial waterbirds and ardeids, as well as of the recently established Brown Pelican, have thrived during the 1990s, likely due in large measure to decreased levels of human recreational uses of key portions of the Salton Sea (Molina 1996), and

WHEREAS the Salton Sea has experienced high levels of eutrophication, salinization, and contamination, resulting in diminished water quality and recently culminating in large-scale mortalities of birds and fish, and

WHEREAS freshwater sources for the Salton Sea are currently under threat from planned diversions to coastal urban regions of California, and

WHEREAS current attempts by government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private concerns, and lawmakers to "save" the Salton Sea are gaining momentum,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS recognize the significance of the Salton Sea to wildlife and supports rehabilitation and conservation efforts for the Salton Sea that are responsive to the needs of wildlife and based on sound and thorough biological data; that recognize the importance of freshwater, delta, brackish, saline, and agricultural habitats at the Salton Sea; that improve water quality and guarantee continued adequate sources of freshwater; that stress the critical need for protection and isolation of waterbird colonies from human and other disturbance; and that seek to minimize threats to wildlife potentially resulting from urban and recreational development.

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## FEATURED PHOTO

### FIELD SEPARATION OF BISHOPS (*EUPLECTES*) FROM NORTH AMERICAN EMBERIZIDS

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Any puzzlement readers might feel over the identity of the bird on the back cover only serves to strengthen the point I have chosen to illustrate. This species' nondescript sparrowlike appearance has caused field identification problems through much of California in recent years. Its unfamiliarity stems from its absence from North American field guides and avifaunal works and is symbolic of the increasing naturalized populations of non-native bird species that now thrive in many human-altered habitats in California.

Bishops and widowbirds of the genus *Euplectes* are native to sub-Saharan Africa but have been introduced into several other regions of the world (Long 1981). Little is known of the history of establishment of the Orange Bishop (*Euplectes franciscanus*, also known as the Northern Red Bishop) in California; individuals or small groups were noted in urban and suburban habitats of coastal southern California by the late 1970s (pers. obs.). High rates of importation, along with ongoing modifications of lowland habitats, have promoted a burgeoning population of this species in coastal California. Flocks of 50 to 100 bishops are now routinely noted in some flood-control basins near Los Angeles (W. S. Smithson pers. comm.). The female or basic-plumaged male Orange Bishop shown here was photographed at the Sepulveda Wildlife Area, Los Angeles Co., California, on 9 December 1995.