

WESTERN TANAGER



“The Lagoon” (Page 20) | Photo by Suu Zhou



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TELL US YOUR NATURE STORY

LAAS has a new column for our *Western Tanager* newsletter called "**From Our Readers.**" Now that more of you are at home with some time on your hands, please consider writing an article for us!

You are welcome to submit articles and comments to the *Tanager* editorial staff at: susancastor@laaudubon.org

Thank you to May/June 2020 issue contributors *Irwin Woldman, Rachel Gaffney, Mary Ann Lower, Teresa Thome, Melissa Fitzpatrick Haylock, Carl Hall, Andy Birch, and Dorothy Steinicke* for your contributions to our column kickoff. (Pages 15 to 24)

Articles from the *Western Tanager* are also published online as "Blog Pages". Web readers are invited to use the online "comment boxes" at the bottom of each online blog/article/page.

Linda Oberholtzer, Editor

Susan Castor, Layout Editor

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

My term as President of Los Angeles Audubon Society is coming to a close at the end of June, and although I will give the annual Members' Meeting in June, it will likely be a virtual meeting. Such is the way of life in the time of 'social distancing'. So, I thought I would give you an update and glimpse into our operations in this distressing time as we contend with the novel Corona virus.

Our Staff and Board have shifted operations to 'virtual' everything: online classrooms, staff meetings, board meetings, and our monthly evening programs. With schools closed, we have decided to keep as many of our educational programs going online as we can. And, we have determined that we can use this time for staff development as well as updating and refreshing existing programs. There have been no furloughs for staff!

The West Los Angeles College Conservation and Stewardship Certificate program continues online with Emily Cobar at the helm with support from Ingrid Carillio, Arely Mendia and Edgar Pedrosa. The online meetings have kept the students engaged with nature notebooks, video garden and habitat tours, as well as habitat restoration segments. Birds and their habitats figure prominently in the course work. This certificate program requires a certain number of hours spent at one of the local Baldwin Hills parks implementing a project for the betterment of wildlife habitat at the parks; therefore, the volunteer hours will have to wait until the 'social distancing' regulations and park closures are lifted.

The Los Angeles Audubon Society school tours at Ballona Wetlands and the Baldwin Hills were one of the first casualties even before the schools were closed. Nonetheless, our amazing Cindy Hardin continues to keep her docents looking to nature to sustain them through this time even without their school tours and Open Wetlands. She is also working to produce virtual tours of both Ballona Wetlands and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area to provide elementary through middle school teachers with some temporary substitutions for the real tours that have been booked through the end of this school year.

Stacey Vigallon has become an expert with online learning, keeping the Greenhouse Program going, connecting twice a week with high school students in the Restoration Leaders' track and the Research Interns' track online. It is awe-inspiring to watch while she also keeps staff on track with our twice weekly, online meetings, where we all check-in and trade ideas for various resources for the environmental education programs. She was able to coordinate the spring surveys for Western Snowy Plovers and Least Terns before beach closures.



Esperanza Elementary School Native Garden, Photo by Brad Rumble



Esperanza Elementary School Native Garden, Photo by Brad Rumble

We have had to cancel all of our spring volunteer restoration events, including the 100-person Earth Day at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook State Park event sponsored by California State Park Foundation. We have been able to work with California State Parks and Los Angeles County Parks to allow our staff to continue to care for our greenhouses that house greenhouse seedlings and container plants ... and even working to weed in our most recent restoration areas. Honest—staff begged me to let them keep weeding! With proper distancing, working in ones or twos, and now with masks, the work with the plants keeps staff grounded, so to speak.

And, of course, our wonderful birding programs at various local parks and field trips have had to be cancelled until further notice, but I am pretty sure that the birds don't mind.

I would be remiss if I didn't report on the 70th bird species at our most recent Schoolyard Habitat at Esperanza Elementary School as photographed by principal Brad Rumble. A Lazuli Bunting singing in the habitat! I think we will have a big future in providing more schoolyard habitats for urban schools since a trip to the habitat will not require buses and might be easier to keep students at safe distances from each other.

I must admit that initially, trying to coordinate all the moving parts of our Los Angeles Audubon Society had me more than a little nervous with early decisions to cancel our kick-off Nature Demands Action fundraiser, followed by deciding with field trip leaders to cancel or not to cancel, and canceling our March evening program, as well as trying to plan staff work with daily changes to access to our greenhouses at the State and County parks ... but now we have all settled into the new routine of 'Staying Safe' here in Los Angeles. And, so we continue on with the mission of Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Carol Babeli is hard at working writing the grants that we will need, as well as keeping all aspects in play to re-schedule our cancelled fundraiser. So stay tuned. Susan Castor is tracking our membership as well as working to get out the *Western Tanager*.

I want to thank you all for your membership in the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Please stay safe and well.

Gratefully yours,

Margot Griswold, President
Los Angeles Audubon Society



Arely and Emily moving cactus.



Edgar and Ingrid weeding at BHSO

LAAUDUBON MONTHLY PROGRAMS GO ONLINE

By Travis Longcore



In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, LAAS has retooled our monthly program series to present the lectures as livestreamed videos. The first installment, a report on the Griffith Park Raptor Survey, went smoothly, with 25 online participants on a videoconference platform that allowed discussion between the attendees and with the presenter, Courtney McCammon and project collaborator Dan Cooper.

The lecture also livestreamed to Facebook and is recorded there and can be watched on demand.

[<https://www.facebook.com/events/215701746157559/>]

Participation does not require Facebook, just contact Travis Longcore (travislongcore@laaudubon.org) for instructions to join the videoconference without Facebook. For May, the presenter will be Dr. Allison Shultz of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Dr. Shultz was a recipient of a grant from the Schreiber Fund at Los Angeles Audubon Society when she was in graduate school and we are now delighted that she is the curator of ornithology at the museum where Dr. Schreiber worked. She will present on the evolution of feather color in the tanagers.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2020

LIVESTREAM VIDEOCONFERENCE, 7:15 PM – 8:45 PM

Dr. Allison Shultz Presents

Evolution of Feather Color in the Tanagers

Join Allison Shultz, Assistant Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, as she talks about the evolution of feather color in the largest family of birds - the tanagers. She will talk about why she is careful to use a bird's visual perspective to study this important signaling trait, and how natural and sexual selection have shaped plumage color in males and females. She will end her talk by describing some of her current work on the mechanisms underlying the great diversity of colors in birds. **The presentation will be online.** Contact Travis Longcore at travislongcore@laaudubon.org for participation instructions.

JUNE 2020 ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING

Details to be announced online at
www.laaudubon.org/events

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

What's going on now that LAAS outdoor education programs are (*Coronavirus*) cancelled?

By Cindy Hardin, Director of Outdoor Education

Well, like much of the State of California, our outdoor education programs for school children at Ballona and Kenneth Hahn came to an unexpected and grinding halt in mid-March [2020]. Over the past few years both programs have been particularly robust. For the 2019–2020 school year virtually all tour slots had been filled by January, we had a solid roster of fabulous volunteers, and a particularly wonderful crop of college interns at Kenneth Hahn. And then—da-da-da-dum! We all know what happened. Prior to the schools closing down physical spaces altogether, it was mandated by LAUSD that field trips would be cancelled for the foreseeable future. That future is currently unforeseeable, as we wait, along with the rest of the country, for events to unfold during these uncertain times.

However, up until the shut-down last month, we had lots going on at the wetlands and in the Baldwin Hills. Our annual training courses for both sites concluded in mid-October. We were treated to sessions with some incredible guest instructors. One of the highlights occurred at Ballona when we were visited by Greg Pauly, head of the Herpetology Department at the Natural History Museum. As Greg was dazzling us with his lizard lassoing skills, he rolled back a log very close to the Ballona trailer, and discovered a young Pacific Rattlesnake! This was an exciting find, as it was the first sighting in this particular area of the Reserve, and shows a level of biodiversity that is the hallmark of a high functioning ecosystem. All in attendance were thrilled. We also had great participation in our end of training docent field trip to the Bolsa Chica Wetlands. It's always fun to see what is happening at this beautiful wetland complex to the south, and we saw over 40 species of birds during our outing.

By the end of October, we were hosting students from local schools at both Kenneth Hahn and Ballona. Our FIRST SATURDAY OPEN WETLANDS event was also seeing attendance of over 45 visitors each month—things were really humming along.

During the Winter Break we always try to do some docent enrichment sessions; this year we had two new adventures. The first was a trip to UCLA, where the university's Chief Officer of Sustainability, Nurit Katz, provided a fabulous tour of the campus that highlighted the many things they are doing to improve the capture of rainwater and create better habitat for birds and other creatures. Lawns have been removed and replaced with native plantings, permeable surfaces have replaced hardscape, and there was even a green roof to observe. The changes make for a much livelier (lots of birds were seen) and visually interesting campus, and it was quite inspiring to see how public spaces can be made to be much more wildlife friendly.

Our second trip was in partnership with the docent program at Topanga Canyon. Many of our volunteers do double and even triple duty with other outdoor educa-



Expert docent Iris Takashima and excited students at Ballona.

tion programs, and both Dorothy Steinicke and Jamie Lowry are quite active in the Topanga program, in addition to the work they do at Ballona. It was their suggestion that the group visit Topanga, with an emphasis on Native Plants and how they were used by Native Americans. We chose a day in early January that just so happened to be absolutely gorgeous, clear and sunny. Our group of 30 was divided and rotated into two different hikes. Dorothy enlightened us on the native plants present, and Jamie gave a terrific tutorial on how these plants were used by the Native Americans. Patricia, who is in charge of the docent program at Topanga, was also kind enough to open up the Visitor Center just for our group. We had plenty of time to wander this great little space between Hike 1 and Hike 2, and before we sat down to a picnic lunch under the oak trees. We owe the Topanga crew a tour of Ballona!

A historically dry January and February meant that we were able to host tours three days a week. Between Kenneth Hahn and Ballona, our team of staff and volunteers helped over 900 students from underserved schools do some serious nature exploring during this period. All was going splendidly!



Jamie Lowry has made it her mission to increase and share her knowledge of local Native Americans. She enlightened us during our outing to Topanga Canyon State Park.



Dorothy Steinicke taught us about montane varieties of native plants that were new to some of us.



A most perfect spot for a picnic—under the oaks at Topanga.

The month of March started the same way—perfect weather and lots of tours were scheduled. We did have one free date in the first week of March, and took advantage of another gorgeous day to make a docent trip to Crystal Cove State Park in Laguna Beach. The group strolled through beautiful coastal sage scrub habitat along ocean bluffs, hiked El Moro canyon and did some tidepooling along the shore. It was another great session of learning and comparing and contrasting the habitat of the park with that of our usual work sites. And then . . . field trips were banned and then schools were closed in quick succession. At the moment, a return to implementation of our wonderful programs is open to speculation. Obviously the hope is to do so sooner than later, but patience is the operative word here—we must simply wait and see.

However, this unexpected and somewhat unstructured period has left some time for projects that have been long in the back of my mind. So while the usual activities of the program are on hiatus, we at LA Audubon are still thinking about how to create interest and understanding of nature amongst the students of Los Angeles. Over the years we have occasionally received requests for a video about Ballona. To that end, we are now in the midst of making mini movies about the programs at both Ballona and Kenneth Hahn. This will be a useful tool for teachers,

and serve to support our curriculum on the tours. The films might also be used as part of our docent training in the Fall.

Although constraint of movement, fear of contagion and financial worries are all part and parcel of the current situation, there are some unexpected and encouraging developments too. The lack of cars on the roads and drastic reduction in air travel has created a significant improvement in air quality and reduction of noise pollution. Many folks are commenting amongst themselves and on social media that they are more aware of birdsong, and thrilled at the crystal clear views. Neighborhoods all over town are seeing a huge uptick in pedestrian, bicycle and skateboard activity. People have more time to step outside and take a bigger view of their surroundings. It is my hope that the silver lining will be a deeper connection to the natural world amongst the general population. These type of connections help to foster a commitment to better stewardship of the Earth, and more thoughtful consumption of her precious and finite natural resources. It has been predicted by medical experts that some of our new practices, like social distancing, might be a part of our life for quite some time. It is my hope that a heightened awareness of the fragility of our natural world is another after effect that will be permanent. In the meantime, if there is opportunity to spend time outside in a



Connecting habitats is a crucial part of creating and maintaining healthy ecosystems. I was lucky enough to attend the groundbreaking of a pedestrian bridge over La Cienega. This will provide the final connection between the Baldwin Hills and the ocean via the fantastic Park to Playa trail.

safe manner that respects the parameters that are now in place, please do so. The unexpected “March Miracle” of additional wonderful rainfall has produced one of the juiciest Spring seasons in recent memory. Treat yourself with nature as medicine for the body and soul!

On a personal note, in writing this article I am reminded of the valuable work that the Los Angeles Audubon Society does to enhance and inspire knowledge about the natural world that exists right here in the second largest city in the country. At times it feels as if we are in Week 127 of this pandemic, when in reality we were using the outdoor classroom to work together and spread the love of nature less than two months ago! But we at LAAS are still here, and when the time is appropriate will be back with, I suspect, even more enthusiasm and renewed sense of purpose. Stay tuned for more LAAS adventures!

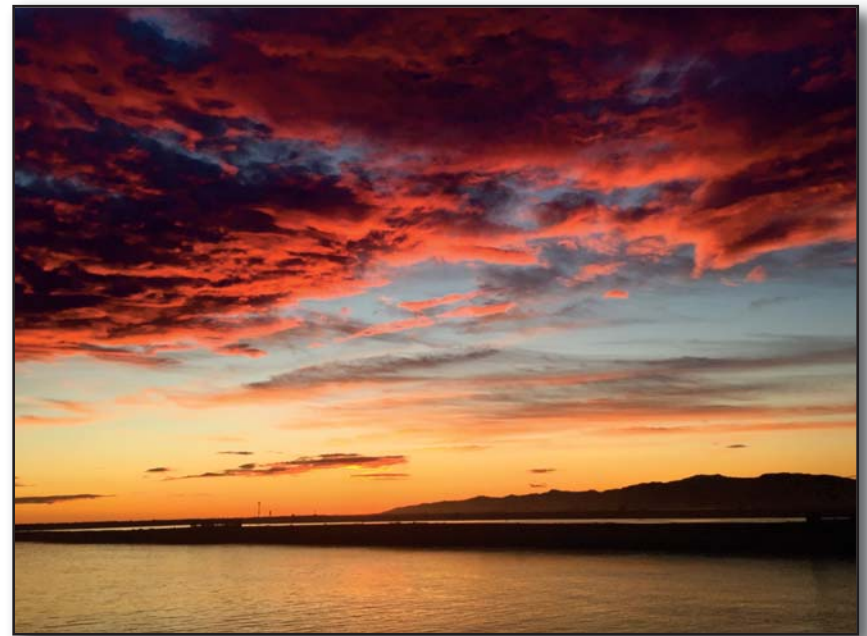


A flower filled Spring at beautiful Ballona.



Poppy and pollinator, a perfect match!

*Treat yourself with nature as
medicine for the body and soul!*



Let's keep our focus towards the bright side—sunset seen from Ballona Creek.

INTERPRETING NATURE

The Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program leaps into the Age of Online Learning

By Emily Cobar & Edgar Pedroza

Friday, March 13th, 2020 was the last in-person workday of the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program. Given the chaos of school closure announcements and the rainy weather that day, just a handful of students showed up. We sat on up-turned orange buckets in the greenhouse, surrounded by the plants we had grown from seeds and those that we had planned to install in the park. We talked about what the future of the Greenhouse Program might be for the rest of the school year. Despite the anxiety and uncertainty that permeated that hour-long conversation, students made it clear that they wanted to keep the Greenhouse Program going, even if it meant meeting for virtual workdays.

The following week I sent a digital survey out to the entire group of Greenhouse students, well over forty of them. Staff needed to know not only the interest-level of the group, but also the level of access that our students had to technology and internet. As many recent media pieces have pointed out in the last month, online learning is fraught with equity issues. Students overwhelmingly responded that they would be willing to attend online Greenhouse Workdays if we offered them, and a clutter of devices would be used to tune in as best they could.

Los Angeles Audubon itself was fortunate to have access to online platforms and training sessions through West Los Angeles College (WLAC). The Greenhouse Program is currently linked to WLAC's new Conservation Studies Program

(more about that in a future newsletter article), and I was able to up my tech literacy in Zoom hosting and online course shell development. Los Angeles Audubon staff met repeatedly to strategize, each of us reduced to little Zoom rectangles on our laptops. How on earth do we translate hands-on, nature-based learning to an online class format? At a time when some of our students, like many in our city, will be drawn into the vortex economic and health insecurity, how can we best support them within the context of our education program?

In the space of just two weeks we made the abrupt transition from a no-screens program philosophy to being all about screens. We're learning as we go, and each week presents a new challenge. At the time of this writing, we've completed three weeks of Greenhouse Virtual Workdays. Most importantly, students show up. We all try to find ways to connect with one another and nature as best we can. At our last session, students completed nature observations at their homes. Not everyone has a backyard of their own, but it's springtime, and nature gleefully smacks you in the face with pollen, bugs, and birdsong as soon as you step outside right now. The collage in this article is the result of what students saw in just one fifteen-minute observation session.

At the end of the formal virtual workday activities, we leave the Zoom session going for students to socialize. Greenhouse students come from multiple campuses, and students build

friendships across what can sometimes be very segregated geography in Los Angeles. Students linger, the conversation is lively, and heated debates about anime ensue. Thematically, students' Zoom socializing is not appreciably different from their in-person socializing. But, conspicuously - painfully - absent from Zoom session socializing are the arm-punches, the hugs, all the physical hallmarks of high school friendship. The students miss the physical presence of their friends.

We're still not sure when we'll all be able to meet again in person to dig holes, wrestle chrysanthemum out of restoration areas, and survey for birds. For now though, I will take Virtual Greenhouse any day over no Greenhouse.

Images for our April 14th stay-at-home nature collage were contributed by the following Baldwin Hills Greenhouse students: Abril Sernas, Ahmad Rizwan, Akari Johnston, Axel Maya, Ayanna Higgins, Azul Calderon, Bianca Mayoraga, Bruno De Leon, Denny Lorenzano, Eddie Acevedo, Emily Garcia, Eva Gibbs Zehnder, Isabella Kelly, James Lopez, Sasha Holland, Savannah House, Sienna Koizumi, Sophia Nicklas, Vera Fang, Vivien Adler.



YOUNG BIRDERS

A Birder's Paradise: the Atlantic and Pacific Slopes of Oaxaca, Mexico

By Dessi Sieburth



The Rosita's Bunting is endemic to southwestern Mexico.

I visited the Mexican state of Oaxaca for a birding trip from January 11th to January 17th, 2019. Oaxaca is located southeast of Mexico City, and is the 5th largest Mexican state. It is bisected by the Sierra Madre Mountain range, which creates a continental divide between the Atlantic Slope to the north and the Pacific Slope to the south. The two slopes vary greatly in habitat; the Pacific Slope is mostly dry, with coniferous forest and dry scrub, whereas the Atlantic slope has high rainfall and is largely covered by rainforest. Consequently, the two slopes are home to different bird species; the Atlantic Slope harbors iconic rainforest species like toucans, oropendolas, and antpittas; the Pacific Slope is home to many endemic species and migrants from North America like buntings, warblers, and wrens. The slopes are separated by a large gorge through the Sierra Madre Occidental known as the Continental Divide, but birds seem reluctant to cross it. I had the privilege of visiting both slopes, and I especially enjoyed



Boucard's Wren, an Oaxacan endemic, abounds in the desert-like habitat.

seeing the endemic birds of the Pacific Slope.

We began our birding adventure near Oaxaca's capital, Oaxaca City. Oaxaca City is located at an elevation of 5,000 feet, in an isolated valley that has many species of birds not found elsewhere in the world. We searched the dry desert-like habitat for endemics around Yagul, the hometown of our very knowledgeable guide, Eric Martinez. The first of these endemic species we saw was a Boucard's Wren that resembles our Cactus Wren. Like Cactus Wrens, they build their nests deep in a cactus to protect their young from predators. Other endemic species we saw and heard were Gray-breasted Woodpeckers eating fruit on the cacti, White-throated Towhees, and female Beautiful Hummingbirds, which spent most of their time flying low near the ground.

We continued to the Pacific Slope at the dry pine-oak woodland at the northern end of the valley, where it borders the Sierra Madre Mountains.



Long-tailed Wood-Partridge

After hearing the bizarre call of a Long-tailed Wood-Partridge, another Mexican endemic, we were lucky to see it and got some recordings. In fact, our guide had seen the species only twice before! To hear the bird's call that I recorded, visit <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/136662941>. After that, we observed the common endemic "Sumichrast's" Scrub-Jay, currently considered a subspecies of Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay found in the Great Basin of North America. However, it looks and sounds quite different from Woodhouse's, so it is possible that it may have its own species status one day. The incredibly beautiful endemic Red Warbler was common as well. In these woodlands, birds often form large multi-species flocks, often led by endemic Gray-barred Wrens. After hearing the call of the Gray-barred Wren, we were soon surrounded by a flock of 15 wrens, along with specialties such as the endemic Dwarf Jay, Elegant Euphonia, and Collared Towhee.

The following morning, we drove due north from Oaxaca City over the continental divide to the rainforests of the Atlantic Slope. Once in the rainforest, we observed species like the Keel-billed Toucan, Crimson-collared Tanager, and Montezuma Oropendola. This habitat also houses a few endemic species, the most notable being the Sumichrast's Wren, which inhabits caves in limestone outcrops, as well as the beautiful Azure-



The Sumichrast's Scrub-Jay, an endemic subspecies, differs from our California Scrub-Jay by lacking a breast band and a white eyebrow.



The Montezuma Oropendola is a common rainforest species from eastern Mexico to Panama.

crowned Hummingbird which perched and foraged from the understory of the forest canopy. On the Atlantic Slope we saw migrants from eastern North America, such as Magnolia, Hooded, and Blue-winged Warblers, whereas on the Pacific Slope, with its the dry scrub, we found western North American migrants, such as Nashville, Black-throated Gray, and Townsend's Warblers.

The following day we went back to the Pacific Slope to search for endemics along the coast. We obtained excellent looks at Rosita's Bunting, which Francis Sumichrast (of Sumichrast's Wren fame) discovered and named after his wife. While watching the Rosita's, an equally beautiful bird, the Orange-bellied Bunting, popped up right next to it. Both buntings are endemic to western Mexico. That evening, we did some owling and were rewarded with looks at a roosting endemic Pacific Screech-Owl, a cavity nester that eats insects and small rodents, and several Mottled Owls, which were making distinctive deep, popping

hoot calls. One of my favorite sightings were several Buff-collared Nightjars resting on the cliffs. They are nocturnal, and because of their weak legs, they can not perch in trees. Usually, this species is incredibly secretive and often heard rather than seen, but we got within 20 feet of nearly a dozen on the cliffs!

On our final day, we spent the morning in the mountains on the Pacific coast before driving back to Oaxaca City. We saw the endemic Blue-capped Hummingbird and Wagler's Toucanet. While eating our final lunch at an outdoor restaurant at a shaded coffee plantation, Eric suddenly paused and yelled "Black Hawk-Eagle!" He had heard the bird despite being in a noisy restaurant, and surely enough, when we looked up, a Black Hawk-Eagle was soaring over with some Black Vultures.



This West Mexican Wood Owl is an endemic subspecies of the Mottled Owl.



The exquisite Orange-breasted Bunting was seen on the Pacific Coast.

My Oaxaca birding trip was spectacular. My favorite part was seeing the endemic birds as well as the beautiful rainforest. The state of Oaxaca with its Pacific and Atlantic slopes is one of the most important areas for high biodiversity in Mexico, which makes it an extraordinary birding location. Unlike other parts of the Neotropics, Oaxacan forests remain largely intact and one reason for this is that local communities have ownership rights over their forests. They manage many of their forest areas and they collaborate with conservation agencies to practice sustainable and conservation-oriented land use. One example of this are shade-grown coffee plantations, where coffee plants are planted under a native tree canopy, which provides habitat for migratory and endemic birds. Treeless sun-grown coffee plantations often produce higher coffee yields, but they contribute to deforestation and offer little habitat for birds. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center certifies shaded coffee plantations with a high biodiversity as “bird friendly.” We can help migratory and endemic birds in the tropics by buying certified bird-friendly early-bird Allegro coffee at Whole Foods.

Thanks to Eric Martinez, our bird guide (mirmidons_1987@yahoo.com), biologist John Sterling, as well as Lance Benner and Kathi Ellsworth. 🐦



The Rosita's Bunting has subtle shades of blue and pink.



This Buff-collared Nightjar, normally difficult to see, provided excellent looks.



The endemic Collared Towhee was a common inhabitant of the highlands of the Pacific Slope

FROM OUR READERS

ATTU ISLAND -WHAT IS THERE? & WHERE IS IT?

By Irwin Woldman



Temnac Valley | Photo courtesy of <http://www.tsuru-bird.net/attu>

Any serious birder has certainly heard of Attu Island and dreamed of the exotic vagrant and expected birds found on the western most island in the Aleutian chain of Alaska-i.e. North America. Unfortunately, few have had the opportunity to visit that isolated land to experience its unique avian presence. I was able to book a week's trip there in January 2–10, 1990.

Attu is the farthest island from the mainland in the chain stretching some 1600 miles southwest from Anchorage. It is volcanic in origin and we viewed steam from an after-blast during our flight from Anchorage, on one of those interim land masses. There are no villages, towns or other human presence there with the exception of a modern self-sustaining

Coast Guard base structure and a crew to maintain it and guard access. During WWII, the Japanese took over the island for about one year, but abandoned it afterwards. Attu is about 300 miles east of the Commodore Islands owned individually by Russia and the U.S.

We, the week's participants, independently reached Anchorage and gathered at the designated hotel to meet and dine together. We were to be the final week's party of a four week outing by ATTOURS to Attu. Other

birders had been there for all or part of the past 3 weeks.

The following day was spent birding in and around Anchorage under the leadership of local birders and other leaders familiar with the area and its more favorable birding locations. Some of the specialties were Arctic Terns, Boreal Owl, Rusty Blackbird, Willow Ptarmigan and Varied Thrush, all in their finest summer plumage.

After another night in the hotel, we transferred to the airport and boarded a chartered Reeves Aleutian Airways flight. After lift off we basically followed the entire Aleutian chain as a guide to our destination. We did set down in Cold Bay to refuel, because Attu

had no fuel or mechanic support, then on to its terminus. Upon arrival, the plane did not turn off their engines, as they would have had to send to Anchorage for a mechanic if the engines did not start again.

When we arrived at Attu and unloaded our equipment and personal gear, we were each issued a two-wheel bicycle that was our sole transportation for the coming week, and biked to our campsite. The quarters consisted of two quonset huts, both generator heated, one for our living and sleeping quarters and the other for kitchen, dining area and quarters for the leaders. Our sleeping quarters also had a "drying room" where a generated heater dried our daily wet clothes and boots. A shower there was basic, but functional. A single-stall outdoor outhouse was our toilet. The unwritten, but verbal command was that, when a line had formed for use, that any arriving woman would go right to the front of the line, UNLESS, any line male is in "dire circumstances" for its use A.S.A.P ...

We ate breakfast in the dining unit where we discussed the day's outing and which leader was going where that day. After evening meal, we updated the day's checklist from the different parties' outings and discussed the next day trip offerings. Each morning we picked up a prepared box lunch which would be our midday meal and chose a leader to go with. During the day, each leader phoned the campsite hourly where they collected and disbursed vagrant bird information to everyone interested. If you wanted to add that bird, you could bike over to that site and hope that the bird or birds were still present. Many of the birding hot spots had names such as Murder Point, Navy Beach, Barbara Point, Town West Massacre Valley, Tattler Creek and more.



White-tailed Eagle | Photo Courtesy of <https://macaulaylibrary.org/photo/26861391>

One day each week was devoted to a trek to Temnac Valley to see the only White-tailed Eagle in North America. There were formerly two, but one apparently died. To reach there we biked to the end of the runway, left our bikes there, hiked over many tundra hillocks, roped down the side of a hill, forded a stream and hiked another mile where we did have good scope views of the Eagle. In order to ford the stream and keep from getting our feet wet and cold, we were each given a plastic trash can liner. We stepped inside it, pulled the sides up to our chins and slowly and carefully walked across the foot high watery stream. On the way back we reversed the walk, forded the stream, roped up the hill and walked and biked back to campsite. I was "wasted" the next day and stayed in camp to recoup.

seen by several people. Aleutian Terns were often flitting above the runway or nearby shore.

Shorebirds seen by me were Rock Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit. Kittlitz's and Ancient Murrelets were also observed. Both Tufted and Horned Puffins were noted. Of the land birds, Common Raven, Rosy Finch, Winter Wren and the first documented nesting of Black-backed Wagtail in North America. Mammals consisted of small Island Fox (very tame) and some rats.

Other worthwhile birds seen during the 1st 3 weeks or during my week, but not seen by me, included Yellow-billed Loon, Northern Fulmar, Eurasian Widgeon, Tufted Duck, King Eider, Common Goldeneye, Wandering and Gray-tailed Tattler, all 3 Jaegers, Glaucous Gull, Think-billed

As for the birds, Lapland Longspurs were our common "backyard" species all in super nice breeding plumage and full song. Rock Ptarmigan were common and a daily tic. Glaucous-winged Gulls were ubiquitous with the rare and distant sighting of probable Slaty-backed Gull seen by many. Also seen were Black-legged and Red-legged Kittiwake Gulls. Laysan Albatross and Red-throated Loon were regular sights off shore. Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants became the expected species observed and a great change from our usual California species. Single Short-tailed Shearwater and Emperor Goose were

Murre, Crested Auklet, Yellow Wagtail, Olive Tree Pipit, Rustic Bunting, Brambling, Common and Hoary Redpoll, Hawfinch, and more Slaty-Backed Gulls.

As it was near the summer equinox, we had daylight from about 2 AM to 10 PM. Temperatures varied from about 55 degrees during the day to near freezing at night. Rain visited us on 2 days and snow flurries were infrequent and light.

Since ours was the final week of that ATTOUR year there, we were responsible for packing all of the equipment, kitchen gear and storing of bicycles and the gas powered cargo hauler for succeeding outings there. Our Reeves flight arrived on time on the last day there. We efficiently loaded the cargo and our personal gear and bid goodbye to this unique land. It was unusually sunny when we took off, so the pilot circled the island giving us a rare view of the other side. Most of the island had been off limits to us, as there was possibilities of unexploded ordinance lying around from the War that had never been cleared by any of our armed forces.

Our leaders were from Chicago, Connecticut, Texas, Alaska and elsewhere in the U.S. and Canada. Sandy Komita held "court" each evening in the Barracks. At that time, he held the record for the most birds seen in a calendar year in the ABA area. He was at it again. Pete Dunne and his wife were also present from Cape May, N.J. One or two days that week he would park at Murder Point and watch/estimate the number of Laysan Albatross passing by the point.

We arrived back in Anchorage on schedule and we disbursed to continue on to our various home turfs. What a fantastic and unique tour! Unfortunately, ATTOUR cancelled outings there in the late 1990s. 🐦

FROM OUR READERS

Los Angeles: The Place to Pursue Your Dream (of Birding)

By Teresa L. Thome, Photos by Teresa L. Thome



I am a part-time Californian. I have a loving husband and home in Michigan. In 2015, I drove out to LA to pursue a part-time creative life. I've dabbled in birding since I was 18, but my time in California, with access to so many birds has put that passion into overdrive.

And the one place that I keep going back to—the place that has my heart, is Franklin Canyon. It's beautiful. It provides several different habitats. There's nary a person there early in the morning. And, it inspires my love of old Hollywood.

I love knowing that I can see a Pie-billed Grebe, a Green Heron and the occasional Double-crested Cormorant where "The Andy Griffith Show" opening was filmed. Or that the road where I see House Finches and Towhees and hear Wrens and Wrentits is the

same road that John Boy drove while filming "The Waltons". I love that I saw my first Red-shafted Northern Flicker where Frank Capra once directed Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable in "It Happened One Night." "On Golden Pond", "The Brady Bunch", "Lassie," "That Girl!" were all filmed in the same place I regularly see Wood Ducks and Mallards swimming, Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures soaring and Anna's Hummingbirds and Black

Phoebes darting about.

It's not always idyllic, though. I nearly lost my mind when I arrived once to find the entire set of "American Horror Story" had sprung up. I saw caution tape near a Cooper's Hawk nest and almost cried. The Parks Department assured me that they had put the tape up to protect the nest. Phew! They were on it.

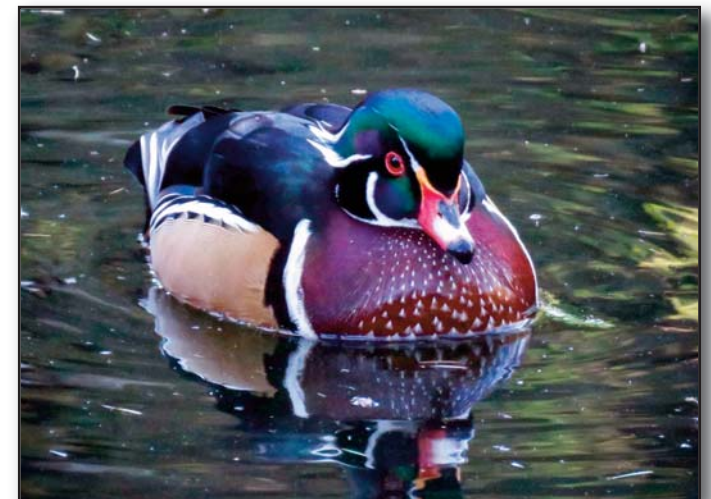
I had to laugh when a security guard for the show, confusing me for paparazzi, told me I wasn't allowed to take photos. "Sorry, but I'm a birder," I said with a wee bit of attitude. "When I see a perched Common Yellowthroat, I'm going to have to take a picture." I gave another security guard my bins to see an Acorn Wood-

pecker in the tree above him. He got a kick out of it and I got a kick out of him. I was delighted to learn the production company planted trees after the entire set was removed. My last visit I couldn't count the number of Oak Titmouse, American Robins and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Because of Coronavirus, I am in Michigan for the foreseeable future. It's good. I need to be here. It makes me wonder, though, if I should give up this two-city life. But then I think about all the birds I see in Los Angeles, all the hotspots, my beloved Franklin Canyon, and I wonder if my heart could handle not having regular access to such a variety of fine, feathered friends.

Los Angeles is the place for creatives to fulfill dreams and for birders to add to their life lists. The desire to pursue artistic endeavors brought me to LA, but the unquenchable thirst for spotting and identifying birds keeps me there. 🐦

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AFFAIR OF THE AIR

By Carl Hall

Feathered forms
who weather the storms
that nature adorns
and imbues
from the perch
of an aerial view
where they lurk
far above the hub
of our human zoo
as they loom in pursuit
of their birthright
towards a worm site
to service their appetites
until they once again ascend
to assume flight
totally in tune
with the dizzying heights
as they pirouette with Lear jets
and neck with scenic sunsets
via a supreme winged fling
they soar and swerve
But don't try this at home
I would strongly urge
for this affair of the air
is strictly for the birds



LET IT RAIN

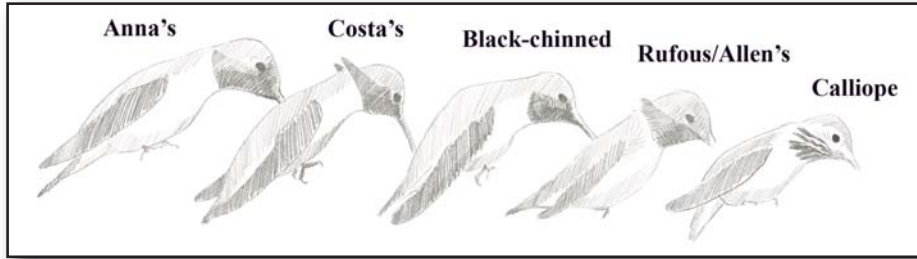
By Carl Hall

It's overcast and cloudy
as moisture cloisters
in a crowded space
Impounding surrounding land-
scape
at a lounging pace
As the humidity fellates
Permitting fluidity
to escape
to its' eventual fate
in a torrential rape
of cities, states
And all individuals
who stand penciled in its' wake
As the the God's assemble
at Heaven's gate
proud to partake
in a rousing ovation
for the outgoing precipitation
Serenaded by angels
in a thirsty refrain
towards their earthly destination
Let it rain

FROM OUR READERS

Lock-down Yard-Birding

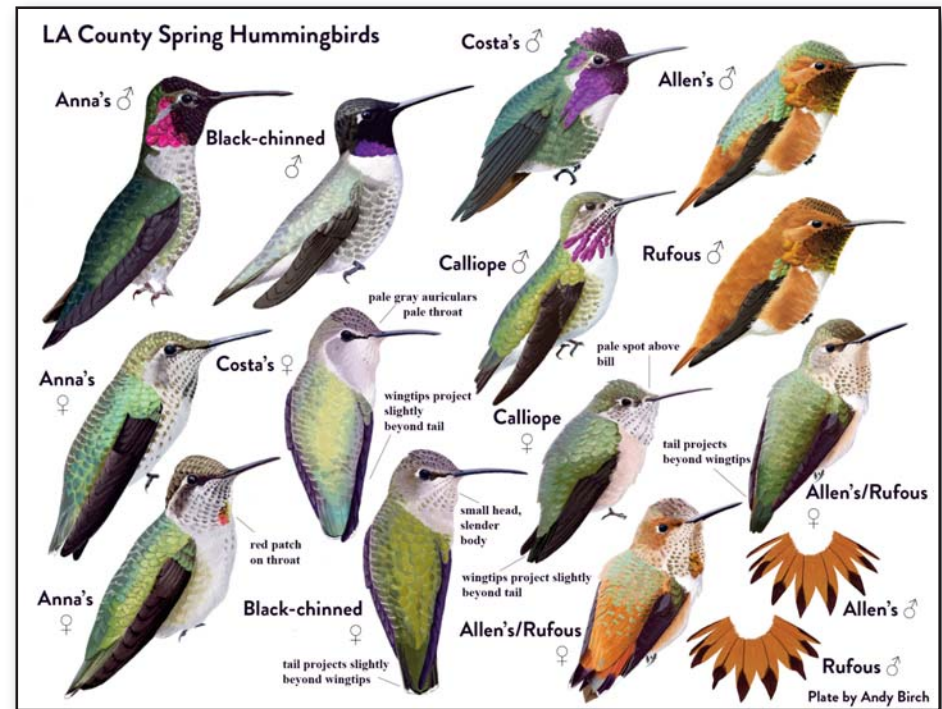
By Andy Birch | Illustrations by Andy Birch



While many birders are using this opportunity to enjoy reduced drive times to their favorite birding spots, for the local patch and yard birder, birding hasn't changed greatly. However, being forced home from work has given myself and many of us a great opportunity to dramatically increase coverage of our local spots or yards during spring migration.

I'm an avid local patch lister. I have several nearby patches (eBird hotspots) that I am passionate about seeing as much as possible within. But I have decided on a complete lockdown during this pandemic period with little to no travel, which meant my yard was instead going to get my undivided attention. My yard list has always been important to me. It all started 10 years ago when we bought this house (our first). For me, owning a house for the first time, came with the added excitement of having a yard. And this one was a blank canvas in need of quite a bit of love. We bought the house during the financial crisis and it, being a short sale, meant that we had only had a cursory look at the place beforehand. So, after we moved in, I was keen to get a good look at the yard. After carrying in the last box, I walked out on to the deck and took a look down at the small, depressing bare, weedy yard. There were 3 birds shuffling around amongst the weeds, so I grabbed my binoculars; an expected White-crowned Sparrow was the first bird, the second bird was a "Slate-colored" Junco. Wow I thought. Not bad for my second yard bird! And then scanning across to the third bird, revealed a female Indigo Bunting! What type of yard do I have here?! The bunting stayed all winter and returned the following year, providing one of the few wintering records for southern California. Other wintering rarities over the years have included Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Summer Tanager and Costa's Hummingbird. Regular Swainson's Hawks and other interesting spring migrants only fueled my belief that perhaps this unassuming yard and its location was a little bit special and worth the effort.

Spring is a perfect time for seeing hummingbirds in LA County and with luck and perseverance, it's possible to see all 6 species that regularly occur in California. The holy grail for LA County birders is the diminutive Calliope. And it is one of the most desired gaps on my yard list. Perhaps, this would be the year? eBird reports across the county and southern California showed that many yard-bound birders scored this beautiful hummingbird at their feeders in what seems like a bumper spring for them. At the time of writing, I've had 5 of the 6 species visit the yard but still no Calliope. I have a particularly vindictive Allen's that chases everything away with such vengeance. I look longingly at my neighbor's feeder, filled with hummingbirds while their resident Allen's sits nearby quite happy to share its space. Female hummingbirds can be one of the harder IDs, so I also used this time to finish a hummingbird plate that had been shelved for years. I find it really helps me understand the plumage differences if I paint an identification plate, so I put together this cheat sheet.



FROM OUR READERS

The Lagoon


By Suu Zhou

Right now in quarantine it feels like ages ago, and such a faraway place, but whenever I'm home for the holidays my parents and I buckle into the car and drive straight to Malibu Lagoon. We park next to Starbucks, my dad gets a coffee and my mom gets an earl grey, and we start the ten minute walk to the lagoon. I have my camera over my shoulder and I point out the birds in the parking lot, the bluebird in a tree that I am sure is pruned as often as the bird may preen.

We always do our normal routine around the lagoon, where we walk along the boardwalk, then the pathway, and stare out at the island, where I might spot killdeer, or sanderlings (if it's winter). We see brown pelicans and cormorants and ravens and perhaps one elegant blue heron, with a couple of groupie egrets. Once we get to the beach, I separate from my parents and hug the bright orange mesh fence, straining my eyes to see the well-advertised snowy plovers, whose nests, although I can't see

them, are out there in the forbidden dunes. "Save the snowy plover!" shout the many printed drawings scattered throughout the area and along the fence. Those cheerful children's drawings depicting the plovers and their homes and chicks are more prevalent in the area than the plovers themselves.

One day there were surprisingly many snowy plovers out, and I took my shoes off, pulled up the legs of my pants, and tiptoed my way through a beach river to look at them and take as many pictures as I could. Round rocks greeted my feet, briny water rushed by, and I marveled at these tiny birds, living their best lives on this gorgeous beach.

Someday, I'll be back there and I'll quietly appreciate the sand and the sea and how the pelicans soar and plummet. I think I'll know what I was missing, then. 



FROM OUR READERS

What Birds Help Us See

By Melissa Fitzpatrick Haylock

To love birds is to know that beauty is all around us, if we just take the time to notice. There is a tree in Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, where I like to walk as often as I can. It's not a very remarkable tree, really. It's small, and it bends in an ungainly way. It stands in one of the least scenic parts of the park, between the main road and a concrete path that winds through a large picnic area.

I'm quite sure I never would have paid the least attention to this tree, except for the fact that I was out for a walk in the park last spring, and a flash of brilliant blue caught my eye. I turned just in time to see a male Western Bluebird disappear into a hole in the tree.

This was the start of a magical couple of weeks. Each time I visited the park, I made sure to stop by the tree to watch the bluebirds. When the male and female started bringing food to the nest, I was delighted, knowing the chicks must have hatched. And I was tickled the day I saw the chicks peeping out from their nest.

The chicks fledged. Later, once or twice, I saw immature bluebirds in the area and smiled. Soon, though, my attention turned to seasonal visitors. The Hooded Orioles in summer. The return of the warblers and Cedar Waxwings in winter.

In February, it started to feel as if spring was on its way. The birds were becoming louder, and I had begun to notice many birds in pairs. I saw a male and female Western Bluebird near the little tree where they had nested last year, and kept my eye on the site, watching for signs of nesting. One day, to my surprise, I saw not a bluebird, but a Nuttall's Woodpecker peeking out of the hole in the little tree. What did this mean? Would it be a woodpecker nest this year? Or maybe a woodpecker nest, followed by a bluebird nest?

We've all been ordered to stay at home now, so I don't know what has happened with the woodpecker, the bluebirds, or the little tree. But I like to think of the birds still there, still going about their business. With less traffic in the city, the air is clean. And with the playgrounds and trails and picnic areas closed, the birds have the park to themselves.

It's hard to know what the future holds right now. So much feels uncertain. But spring will come again. The birds will nest again. We will be able to enjoy the outdoors again. And there will still be beauty, if we take the time to notice. 🐦

Melissa Fitzpatrick Haylock is a speech-language pathologist currently staying at home in Culver City. You can find her bird photos on Instagram [@melissahaylock](#), or email her at melissah_slp@yahoo.com.



FROM OUR READERS

Post Grief: Birding

By Janine Soucie Kelley

I wake to birdsong — hearing the dawn chorus, the sounds as welcome as the sunrise. Leaving the warmth of my goose-down comforter, I hurry on a robe and fleece-lined slippers and walk down the dusky hall to the kitchen to put on the quick-boil kettle for tea. Then I grab a handful of unshelled peanuts from the counter to scatter on the ledge of the back deck. Bins lifted, I wait for the swoop of Steller's Jays to snatch their prize.

They hide out in the majestic Ponderosa pines in my back yard. Cautious, they are waiting too — until I step back, instinct for survival delaying their aerial show, displaying in their flash and flair of wing such panache, such dare-devilry in landing, snatching and taking off, they are the envy of stunt pilots at county fairs.

Months ago, I lay in my queen-size bed, too big for one, pinned with grief over the loss of my husband, Big John. A car accident soon followed and, for the first time in my athletic life, I couldn't hike, swim, cycle or ski. Perched and buttressed with pillows, I looked out my bedroom window onto our generous sundeck and saw birds. I didn't know their names — except for the squawking jays my husband and I often admired on Sunday mornings spent over leisurely Southwest breakfasts of huevos rancheros. We dubbed one Elvis for his spectacular pompadour and strut.

An English teacher, I knew the birds of literature: Keats's nightingale, Atticus's mockingbird, Juliet's lark, and Mother Goose's ill-fated Cock Robin and Jenny Wren. But beyond the blue jays in my backyard and the robins of my childhood lawn in Indiana, my academic training hadn't revealed the names of birds singing in the grass or nesting in the juniper bushes of my home in Flagstaff. So I downloaded Cornell's free eBird app. And when Katie, my physical therapist, gave me the green light, I joined Friday bird walks hosted by Jay's Bird Barn, using hiking sticks to support my slow but steadily improving balance. On these friendly outings, I met and connected with simpatico Nature lovers who gladly shared their impressive knowledge of birdcalls. There's a joy in knowing.

Birding keeps us in the present moment. As I looked up and out beyond my loss, I began identifying birds by their shape, tail, beak and color, adding *Junco*, *White-breasted Nuthatch*, *Goldfinch*, *Pine Siskin*, and *Cooper's Hawk* to my vocabulary. I hung four feeders from the beams of the long deck, and one near the aspens in my side yard to welcome more species. January 2020, I became a member of the National Audubon Society.

In this time of the coronavirus, when many of us are house or apartment bound, birding offers us a way to connect with Nature, to connect with beauty, to look beyond our losses, which, though heartrending, are temporary. Looking out our windows, we can find wings. 🐦



FROM OUR READERS

Red-whiskered Bulbul sighting in South Pasadena

By Mary Ann Lower

The first bird I ever saw and identified on my own was a Phainopepla (in Big Bend National Park Texas), that was many years ago. Yesterday, [Apr. 1, 2020] I was out in my back yard, heard a wonderful song (loud and melodious) and after some hard work, I found two birds in my hackberry tree that had the similar outline of the desert bird...but they were black and white with small red marks near their cheeks (no time to get my binocs) after searching by bird books I ID'd them as Red Whiskered Bulebuls. I'm so proud of myself!



Red-Whiskered Bulbul | Photo by Charles Lam, Courtesy of www.alhambrasource.org

Dove Diary

By Dorothy Steinicke

This morning I saw a mourning dove picking up sticks outside our door. It must be nesting time. A few days ago I saw a puffed up male strutting around and circling a female in the backyard, carrying out the rites of courtship.

I hope they have found a new place for their nest. The old site has not worked well for them but that hasn't seemed to stop them.

I remember our excitement the first time we saw them building a nest in the trellis over our patio. My daughters were young then, five and nine years old. We had been playing in the yard when one of them noticed a bird that kept coming back to the trellis with bits of twig in its beak. This was more interesting than whatever we had been doing. We stopped and watched the process for a long time. One dove stayed on the trellis. The other dove made deliveries of building material. When the carrier arrived he would pass whatever he had brought into the beak of the builder. She would poke it in here and there while the supply bird went off for more. After a while they both flew away.

I took this opportunity to lift each girl up to inspect the project. For all their hard labor it really didn't look like much. It was fairly indistinguishable from the other plant debris that had collected on top of the trellis.

That evening I suggested that we make a 'dove diary', a little book where we would record the progress of our mourning dove couple. The girls drew pictures of the birds building their nest. I recorded the date and our observations of the building process.

The next day the birds were at it again. More twigs, leaves and pine needles carried to the corner of the trellis, more prodding about and rearranging. Again they left the project at the end of the day. Again I lifted the girls up so that they could make observations. We all had to agree that it really didn't look very different. I just made a brief notation in the dove diary that work continued.

Nest building went on for several days. We continued to check and report that we really didn't see much progress. Perhaps there was a bit of a soft lining now.

One day the birds were not working. Closer inspection revealed that there was no nest. It hadn't been knocked to the ground. It simply wasn't there. That was the end of the dove diary.



The male mourning dove sits on the nest while a young one peeks out. | Photo by Joe Kelley

The next spring we saw mourning doves again hard at work, again in the same place. I was leery of starting another journal since the previous one had been a bust but we did keep an eye on them. This time they seemed to finish the nest and began sitting on it. We thought there must be eggs even though we couldn't see them.

The trellis corner started to seem not such a bad location. When we had visitors we would point out the nest and sitting dove. They were never able to see it although it was clearly visible to us. It was as if our bond with the birds had given us some sort of magical vision. The sitting bird was absolutely still; we couldn't even see it breathing. The dun color of the bird and the nest blended into the fallen leaves that were also sitting on the trellis. We looked up the incubation period of mourning dove eggs. Two weeks. We dug out the dove diary and began again to record observations. Again things didn't seem to change much from day to day. Whenever we went to check we were met by the steady gaze of the dove parent-to-be. Once again, one day it was all gone. No nest, no doves, no sign of anything on or under the trellis.

This remained consistent through the years; courtship, nest building in

exactly the same spot, sitting on eggs and gone. An odd thing is that it could not possibly have been the same dove couple through the years. They simply don't live that long. Somehow the word was out that the corner of our trellis was a good place for a nest. Clearly the doves were not the only ones privy to that information. Our neighborhood has plenty of available predators: cats, squirrels, and crows, all of them aficionados of bird eggs.

We continued to watch their progress over the years but now we watched with hope rather than expectation. I always wondered why we never saw eggshells or the remains of the destroyed nest.

One year they actually hatched a chick. It was exciting to look into the nest and see the little damp, dark blob with beady eyes and a gaping mouth. That was one of their worst years as far as nest construction. The nest sat precariously over an opening in the trellis. As days passed it was starting to dip into the opening and tilt alarmingly. We decided to give it a little support. We passed some twine back and forth underneath to make a little hammock. This made the parent birds frantic. They both threw themselves on the ground at our feet. One was limping along dragging a wing in the dirt as if it were broken. They were begging us to prey on them and not their chick. We stepped away as quickly as possible.

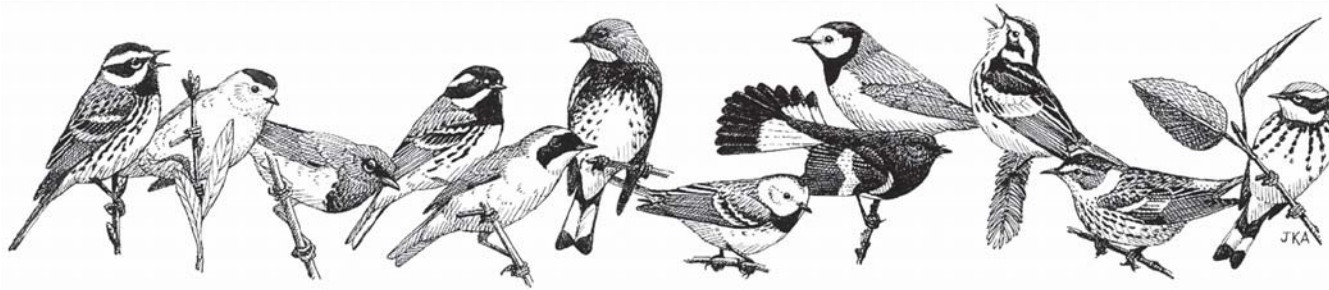
In the end it didn't matter. Within a few days it was all gone again, nest and chick. This time the parents did not abandon the area but stayed, cooing out their grief.

It isn't as if there is any shortage of mourning doves, you hear their ghostly calls in the early morning wherever you are in Los Angeles. It's just hard to see a pair trying to raise a chick year after year and never once fledging one.

We started the dove diary in hopes of helping our children appreciate the wonder and beauty of the natural world. I don't think that is the lesson they learned. I'm afraid that they may have learned that that perseverance does not always lead to success, that the world is a dangerous place for the young and the vulnerable and that parents can't always protect their offspring no matter how heroically they try. These things are all true. I suppose they are as much a part of the wonder and mystery of nature as are the beauty of a nest constructed entirely by a bird's beak or the self-sacrificing devotion of bird parents.

As for this year's pair, I think they have finally chosen another nest location. I see them picking up building materials but haven't yet located where they are taking them. I wish them the best of luck. 🐦

Coda; A month after writing this piece I saw a fluffy mourning dove chick making experimental swoops from the fence to the ground. Success at last.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON — April 2020 | By Jon Fisher

By any standard, this spring has been an unexpected and unprecedented one. It would seem impossible to write this column without mention of the coronavirus pandemic. While birders have been fortunate to be able to continue their pursuits less affected than many others, this birding season has been overshadowed by world events.

We can certainly empathize with everyone affected by the pandemic and understand that leisure activities are well down the priority list. Yet birding and the connection to nature it offers us has provided, as always, an escape from the worries of the day and a way to keep ourselves centered.

Closures of beaches, state and some other parks and trails limited where birding can be done to a degree, but the disruption has not been especially severe. Significant though was the closure of Piute Ponds—the county's best interior wetland—to birders. Also, there have been some positive side effects; the skies of Los Angeles are cleaner than they have been in many decades, human impacts on animals and habitats have sharply declined, and rush hour traffic jams are a thing of the past... at least for now.

Though the rainy season got off to a promising start last fall, our two wettest months—January and February—were essentially a bust, leaving us well behind normal precipitation levels. March and April however appeared determined to make up for the shortfall of the preceding months. So much so that by mid-April we were up to our season average. Good news for birds and habitats; wet winters produce lots of biomass.

Because of the rain, much of the county has been displaying an almost tropical lushness, though this will soon undergo a metamorphosis into the dry brown typical of summer and fall.

Though we've still a ways to go, passerine migration appeared to be fairly robust this spring. By most accounts migrants were liberally distributed across the region. In addition, a handful of migrants showed up ahead of schedule

As expected this time of year, the bulk of notable birds were continuing vagrants that had previously been discovered. Even so, birders managed to turn up some pretty good birds, adding a little excitement to the numbers of expected western migrants.

Here's a look at what was around from late February through April...

Inca Doves continued in very small numbers in Lake Los Angeles in the east Antelope Valley, with one to two birds observed there from March 18–April 5 (Chris Dean). **Common Ground-Doves** remained at their reliable location along the San Gabriel River in the Bellflower and Cerritos area, with three observed there on March 26 (Becky Turley).

Calliope Hummingbirds showed a good movement on the coastal slope from the end of March into April. Every few years this species is detected in above average numbers and this season's significant bloom may be at least partly responsible.

A **Red-necked Grebe** offshore west of Manhattan Beach on February 29 was the only one reported during the period (Lance Benner).

One to two **American Oystercatchers** continued to be seen at Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro through March 28. Others were at Malibu Lagoon through March 13, at Pt Dume in Malibu on March 21 (Dessi Sieburth) and at Topanga State Beach on March 20 (Naresh Satyan).

The wintering **Pacific Golden-Plover** along lower Ballona Creek was observed there through March 23 and a **Solitary Sandpiper**—scarce as a spring migrant—was at Lake Palmdale on April 16 (Cal Yorke).

Gulls of note included a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** along the LA River in Maywood from March 31–April 1 (Chris Dean) and a **Glaucous Gull** in the same area from March 31–April 5 (Richard Barth).

A **Brown Booby**—increasing but still rare in LA County waters—was spotted offshore west of Manhattan Beach on February 29 (Lance Benner).

An **American Bittern** continued at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh through February 29. Seven **Cattle Egrets** at Castaic Lagoon on April 2 was a good number for this species which is rather scarce in the county (Jim Moore, Becky Turley).

Up to four **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** were at Alamitos Bay from February 25–March 1 (Derek Hameister). Another continued at Sims Bio Pond in Long Beach through April 20. We can expect this species to continue to increase in the county.

A maximum of eight **Neotropic Cormorants** were at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale from March 8–9 (Jon Feenstra, Mickey Long), with at least one still there through April 21. Others were at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas from March 14–April 11 (Bob Shallmann), at Peck Road Park in Arcadia on March 15 (David Bell, Luke Tiller), at Castaic Lagoon on March 19 (Cal Yorke) and at Apollo Park near Lancaster on March 29 (Marvin Nelson). At least some of these reports probably involve the same individuals, but nonetheless this spate of records

marks a high point for this species' occurrence in the county.

The **Zone-tailed Hawk** lingering in Monrovia since early 2019 continued through April 17. **Swainson's Hawks** were moving through the region from late January, with numbers concentrated in March and April. A notable high count of 516 birds was over Pasadena on March 16 (Luke Tiller).

Up to three **Long-eared Owls** were at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas from February 7–March 15 (Rod Higbie). This species, generally difficult to detect, is likely more regular on the coastal slope than records would indicate.

Northern “Yellow-shafted” Flickers were in Juniper Hills on March 28 (Kimball Garrett) and at the LA County Arboretum in Arcadia on March 30 (Russell Stone). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at South Gate Park on March 27 (Richard Barth) was the only one reported during the period.

A pale **“Prairie” Merlin** was at Entradero Park in Torrance on March 15 (Adam Johnson), only the second found in the county this year.

The returning wintering **Greater Pewee** in Pacific Palisades continued there through at least March 1. It was first found there in October 2017. Another was very near the same spot in 1974.

Dusky-capped Flycatchers, all likely wintering birds, were found late in the season at Discovery Well Park in Signal Hill from March 23–25 (Kim Moore), at Heartwell Park in Lakewood from March 25–April 23 (Kim Moore) and at the Baldwin Hills Recreation Center on April 10 (Richard Barth).

A wintering **Ash-throated Flycatcher** continued at Madrona Marsh in Torrance through March 15, while the **Brown-crested Flycatcher** at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates continued through March 8.

The returning **Thick-billed Kingbird** at Horsethief Canyon Park in San Dimas was reported through March 27. Though it went undetected for a couple of years, it is almost certain to have wintered there every year since 2014.

Tropical Kingbirds continued at Entradero Park in Torrance through March 19 and at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City through March 20, with two individuals sometimes present. Also of note was a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** found near LAX on March 22 and reported through March 31 (Russell Stone).

A wintering **Dusky Flycatcher** continued at Fox Hills Park in Culver City through March 28, while a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** at Wardlow Park in Long Beach from February 25–27 presumably wintered locally (Becky Turley, Kim Moore).

At Bette Davis Picnic Area in Glendale, the **Eastern Phoebe** continued through March 14. New birds were discovered at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena from March 21–28 (Darren Dowell) and at Hollenbeck Park near Downtown LA on March 22 (Mackenzie Owen).

Rather early was a **Bell's Vireo** at Rio de Los Angeles State Park in Glassell Park on March 5 (Alexander deBarros).

A **Blue-headed Vireo** was found at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on March 4 and reported there through March 11 (Merryl Edelstein). This is the fourth record of this very rare county bird at this locale in the last decade; at least one of these involving a returning bird. Far more expected, but still scarce in winter, was a **Cassin's Vireo** present there from March 5–14.

The continuing **Gray Catbird** at Walnut Creek Park in San Dimas was reported through March 11, though it often proved difficult to see there.

Evening Grosbeaks continued at Grassy Hollow Visitor's Center in the San Gabriel Mountains through March 7, with up to twenty birds being reported.

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** continued at Madrona Marsh in Torrance through April 19.

Dark-eyed "Pink-sided" Juncos were in El Segundo on March 3 (Sara Boscoe) and at The Village Green in Baldwin Hills on March 17 (Richard Barth). A **Dark-eyed "Gray-headed" Junco** continued at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena through February 27. The wintering **Harris's Sparrow** in Rolling Hills on the Palos Verdes Peninsula was reported through April 18. More regular were the five **White-throated Sparrows** recorded on the coastal slope during the period.

One highlight of the spring was a very rare **LeConte's Sparrow** found at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on April 16 (Javier

Vazquez). This bird was seen by many enthused birders though April 20.

A **Swamp Sparrow** at Fox Hills Park in Culver City from March 26–30 was the lone representative of its species (Richard Barth).

Green-tailed Towhees were at Deane Dana Friendship Park in San Pedro on March 20 (Bobby Trusela), near the Ballona Freshwater Marsh from March 28–April 11 (Johnny Ivanov) and in Rolling Hills on April 18 (Jim Aichele, Cathy Nichols).

Orchard Orioles were at Titula School in Redondo Beach on March 20 and at Bluff Park in Long Beach from March 29–30 (Brad Dawson).

Reportable warblers included a **Northern Waterthrush** continuing at Walnut Creek Park in San Dimas through March 9, nine **Black-and-white Warblers** and **American Redstarts** continuing in Calabasas through February 29 and at Skylinks Golf Course in Long Beach from April 8–15 (Becky Turley).

Palm Warblers included one at Caruthers Park in Bellflower from March 27–28 (Loren Wright) and a spring migrant at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on April 24 (Darren Dowell).

Returning to Charlton Flat was a **Grace's Warbler** present from April 16–20 (Naresh Satyan, Chris Dean, Lance Benner). It was first seen at the same location in the spring of 2019.

The **Painted Redstart** wintering at Inglewood Park Cemetery continued through March 21 and another was found in San Dimas Canyon on April 4 (Lance Benner, Kathy Ellsworth).

An above average ten **Summer Tanagers** were found or continued during the period, all on the coastal slope as expected.

While many migrants have already passed through, good numbers will continue through the first half of May and beyond. Vagrants are possible at any time, but the odds will increase toward the end of the month. Despite the aforementioned closures of some parks and trails, there are many areas accessible to birders that have plenty of potential.

The Angeles National Forest remains largely open to birders and offers plenty of potential. In addition to migrants, breeding activity there will be widespread in late spring and early summer.

Likewise many local parks and recreation spots are still accessible, while practicing social distancing. Thankfully that often goes hand in hand with birding anyway. This would be an ideal time to explore under-birded and out of the way places. As always, be sure to take advantage of eBird to record any evidence of breeding when entering your lists.

The seasons are indeed fleeting, but with lots of migration and breeding activity taking place, May should be a great month to bird almost anywhere in the county. Most birders will maximize their days in the field and for good reason. While spring migration is still at the forefront of our minds, fall movements will begin in June, even before the next installment of Birds of the Season arrives. 🐦

FIELD TRIPS

By Nick and Mary Freeman

Friday, June 5

Small Owls of the San Gabriels #2

NO FEE, LIMITED SIGN-UP (10 MAX.), PLEASE REGISTER FOR ONE OWL DATE ONLY

Leaders *Mary and Nick Freeman*. We will be looking for Northern Saw-whet, Western Screech-Owl, Flammulated Owl, and possibly Spotted and Pygmy Owls. Sign up, and meet at 6:00 p.m. on the frontage road for Angeles Crest Hwy (ACH) just north of the 210 Fwy in La Canada. Turn N on ACH, take the second right (Milmada Dr.), and a quick left onto the ACH Frontage Road (signed: Flanders Rd.) and meet along the first 50-yard stretch before the first right turn (940 Chehalem Rd, La Canada Flintridge, CA 91011). Come fed and gassed up, and we will carpool from here. Bring quiet clothing for possible very cold weather (no nylon if possible), a small walking flashlight, binoculars, powerful flashlight optional. Photo ops possible.

SIGN-UP: Email sign-up mandatory.

Send email to:

membership@laaudubon.org. Provide •name(s), •email addresses, & •cell phone #s and wait for email confirmation. (10 max.) Please allow others to attend this popular series by signing up for one date only. (*Other dates: Fri. Jun. 19th, Friday, July 31-NEW*)

For more information call (323) 876-0202, leave voice message if no answer.

CORONAVIRUS AND LAAS FIELD TRIPS

It is quite possible that the following LAAS field trips may be cancelled. Please follow instructions in the write-up to register for these events. Registered participants will be notified by the trip leaders if cancelled & checks are held for deposit until after the event has completed. All UPDATES will also be published online in the EVENTS calendar: www.laaudubon.org/events. (*All previously listed field trips through May 15th are cancelled.* **ALL BIRD WALKS THROUGH JULY 31ST ARE ALSO CANCELLED.**)

Friday, June 19

Small Owls of the San Gabriels

NO FEE, LIMITED SIGN-UP (10 MAX.), PLEASE REGISTER FOR ONE OWL DATE ONLY

Leaders: *Mary and Nick Freeman*. We will be looking for Northern Saw-whet, Western Screech-Owl, Flammulated Owl, and possibly Spotted and Pygmy Owls. Sign up, and meet at 6:00 p.m. on the frontage road for Angeles Crest Hwy (ACH) just north of the 210 Fwy in La Canada. (See May 8 for more details.)

Thursday thru Sunday, July 2-5 Owls & Other Birds of the Southern Sierra

\$165 FEE, LIMITED SIGN-UP OF 8 MIN / 11 MAX

Leaders: *Mary and Nick Freeman*. This year, we will be renting a different, very nice summer home, in a different part of the mountains! Our new summer home will be located in Alta Sierra, west of Lake Isabella. We will meet in the afternoon of July 2 at the "cabin". We will be visiting the Greenhorn and Breckenridge Mountains. Spotted and Flammulated Owls have been seen on our Southern Sierra trips in multiples almost every year. Saw-whet (adult & juv.) and Pygmy Owl may be more reliable in these new mountains! Saw-whet was very obliging last year, on both the LAAS trip and in the new area!

During days, we will search for Pileated Woodpecker, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and perhaps Goshawk, Dipper or Evening Grosbeak!

Accommodations: Couples in larger beds, and up to 2 singles on sofas, will be prioritized, with others *wait-listed until June 15*. Coordinate your contribution for the Thursday potluck with Mary, mnfreeman@earthlink.net. LAAS will provide a weenie roast for the second night, and we always have plenty of leftovers for a third dinner! For more information call Susan at (323) 876-0202, and leave a voice message if no answer.

EMAIL SIGN-UP: Provide complete contact information and *pre-register* by email sent to:

membership@laaudubon.org. Provide •Name(s), •Address, and •Cell Phone and •email address for each prospective participant.

REGISTRATION FEE: Make checks payable to: Los Angeles Audubon Society – Field Trips (or LAAS-FT) and mail to:

Los Angeles Audubon Society
PO Box 411301
Los Angeles, CA 90041-8301

Susan will *email* an acknowledgement when fees are received, and Mary will confirm participation status (8 minimum,

11 maximum) and provide the trip itinerary closer to the date of the trip.

Saturday, July 18

Big Bear Area

NO FEE, EMAIL SIGN-UP REQUIRED

Leaders Mary and Nick Freeman. Target birds include Williamson's and Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Calliope and Rufous Hummers, mountain finches, White-headed Woodpecker, and Mountain Quail. Meet in the Aspen Glen Picnic Area parking lot in Big Bear at 7:30 a.m. Take Hwy 18 or 38 to Big Bear Lake, then proceed about half way along the south side of the lake on Hwy 18 (Big Bear Blvd.) and turn south on Tulip Lane. The lot will be on the south side of this short street. Bring lunch for a full day, and a Forest Service Adventure Pass. Get a hotel room for July 17 (or wake up really early), and a room for July 18 if you plan to dine and owl with the Freemans.

EMAIL SIGN-UP. Send email to: membership@laaudubon.org. Provide •name(s), •email addresses, & •cell phone #s and wait for email confirmation.

Friday, July 31

Small Owls of the San Gabriels

See June 5 for more details.