

# WESTERN TANAGER



*Snowy Egret welcomes you to Bolsa Chica. This photo was taken at the footbridge, adjacent to the parking lot!*



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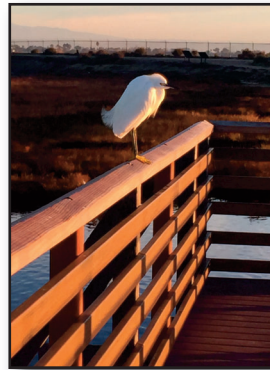
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*The Western Tanager* is the chapter newsletter of the Los Angeles Audubon Society, published online bi-monthly in PDF format, Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec, Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May/June, July/Aug. Articles, letters drawings and photographs concerning conservation, birding, chapter activities, and articles of interest to the membership are welcome for submission. Please send copy as Microsoft Word, RTF documents, or plain text files to [editorwtanager@gmail.com](mailto:editorwtanager@gmail.com). Photos should be high resolution (300ppi) .jpg or .tif files. **Submissions are due the 15th of the month to be included in the following issue (Aug. 15, Oct. 15, Dec. 15, Feb. 15, Apr. 15, June 15th.)** All rights reserved. All photographs are used by permission and are copyrighted material of the credited photographers.

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**ON THE COVER**

*Snowy Egret welcomes you to Bolsa Chica | Photo by Cindy Hardin*  
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**MONTHLY PROGRAMS**

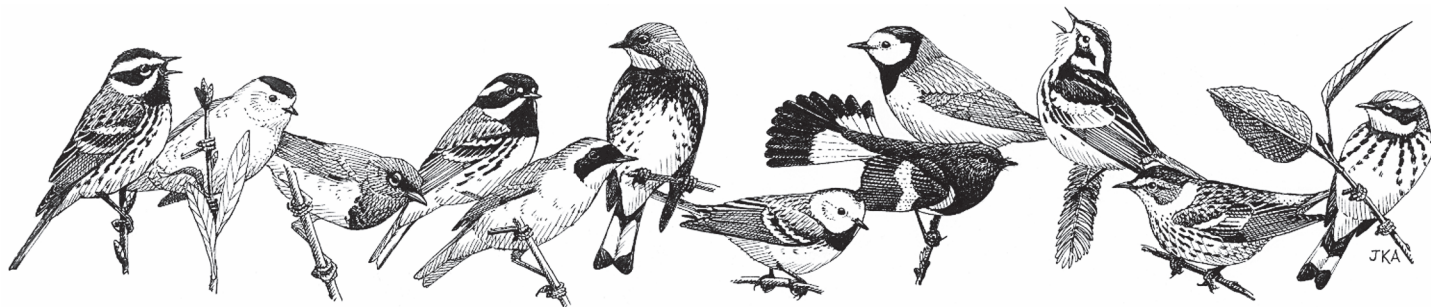
**February 10, 2021, 7:30 pm**

*National Geographic Explorer and Cal State Long Beach professor Ari Martinez will give a presentation on his research on birds in the tropical forests of the New World.*

**March 10, 2021, 7:30 pm**

*A conversation with Irma Muñoz, president and founder of Mujeres de la Tierra, on the new modes of neighborhood engagement necessary in light of changing population demographics in the City and County of Los Angeles.*

*LAAS Field Trips and Bird Walks are suspended until further notice due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Visit us online at [www.laaudubon.org](http://www.laaudubon.org) for updates on ALL LAAS events, meetings, bird walks, lectures and more.*



## BIRDS OF THE SEASON — December 2020 | By Jon Fisher

**W**hile much about the fall and early winter of 2020 was typical, much was not. The pandemic not only continued unabated but its intensity was on the rise. From a purely self-interested point of view, birding continued to be mostly unaffected. A truly ugly fire season thankfully exited with a whimper rather than a bang. Cooler temperatures finally arrived, but were accompanied by little precipitation.

Given La Nina conditions this year, lack of rain was hardly unpredictable. By late December, a typical year would have given us about four inches of rain; this year, most areas were below a tenth of an inch. A late December storm made up a small part of the deficit, but the expected absence of precipitation through the winter will ultimately affect bird habitats and breeding success. Partially ephemeral watercourses such as the San Gabriel River support fewer birds in dry winters.

Looking at the plus side, this was something of a blessing in disguise. Extensive rain would have created havoc throughout and below the extensive burn areas, in addition to the already huge losses of habitat.

On another positive note, we were not left wanting for good birds. For anyone wishing to chase rarities, it was indeed an impressive and enjoyable fall. And for those wanting to make their own discoveries, there was plenty of opportunity. A few very good vagrants were yard birds; the rest were found in all corners of the county.

The remarkable number of vagrants that were found was in no small part related to the ever-increasing number of birders in the county and also to the ease with which rarities can be documented and sightings reported and verified; largely on eBird but also through iNaturalist and various Facebook groups.

A number of Christmas Bird Counts have already taken place and additional notable birds were detected

through birding efforts in various count circles. The only irruptive species much in evidence were Pine Siskins, with above average numbers noted in the lowlands.

Very rare in the county were six **Trumpeter Swans** at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on December 3 (Chris Dean). More expected were two **Tundra Swans** at Quail Lake on November 10 (Dan Maxwell) and one at the Piute Ponds on November 20 (Jane Stavert, Amy Worrell). Four were at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera on November 29 (Michael & Jan Long) and another was picked up for rehab in Santa Monica on December 3 (Austin Sipes). Rounding out sightings were another four at Malibu Lagoon on December 3 (Gary Moore, Celeste Jones). The actual number of individuals accounting for these records is almost certainly less than the aggregate total of sightings.

A **Long-tailed Duck** was along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach from November 13-December 15, with no fewer than four present there on December 15 (Richard Barth, Jeff Boyd).

Rare inland were two **Surf Scoters** at Quail Lake on November 2 (Chris Dean). Up to two **Black Scoters** were at Dockweiler State Beach in El Segundo from November 9-25 (Richard Barth). Another was along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach from November 13-20 (Richard Barth, Jeff Boyd). About a half dozen **White-winged Scoters** were also recorded over the period.

Once more regular in in the county during winter, a single **Vaux's Swift** was at Griffith Park on December 17 (Becky Turley) and fourteen were near downtown Los Angeles on December 7 (Kimball Garrett).

A **Broad-billed Hummingbird** visited a yard feeder in Pasadena from November 20-December 13 and was one of few ever recorded in the county and the first this Mexican species recorded in several years (Tom Mills).

**Sandhill Cranes** included one flying up the Los Angeles River in Long Beach on November 11 (Jeff Boyd) and three others over the Piute Ponds on November 21 and perhaps the same three there again on December 19 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

**Red-necked Grebes** were on Lake Palmdale on November 14 (Kimball Garrett) and at the Ballona Creek mouth on December 8 (Kevin Lapp).

Following a spate of sightings over much of the year, the only **American Oystercatcher** reported was a continuing bird at Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro through November 4.

Along lower Ballona Creek in Playa del Rey, the wintering **Pacific Golden-Plover** continued through December 18. Small numbers of **Mountain Plovers** were in the east Antelope Valley at 50<sup>th</sup> Street East and Avenue N with up to sixteen present from October 31-December 19 (Mark & Janet Scheel). This vulnerable and declining species, as one might expect, is becoming more difficult to find locally.

**Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were at or in the vicinity of Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia on November 14-December 19 (Darren Dowell), at Malibu Lagoon from November 17-18 (Ryan Terrill), at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera from November 30-December 15 (Chris Dean) and at Quail Lake from December 6-20 (Mark & Janet Scheel). This European gull has been increasing in the New World, first in the northeast, later throughout the continent and now in Los Angeles County. As birders become more familiar with this species and its identification, records should continue to increase.

A **Neotropic Cormorant** continuing at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas through October 23 and one at Peck Road Park in Arcadia from December 12-20 (Dessi Sieburth) were the only ones reported. This follows a banner year for this species in which seventeen were reported, though undoubtedly at least some of these were the same birds at different locations.

Unusual inland was a long-staying **Pacific Loon** continuing at Quail Lake through December 14.

An **American Bittern** was at the Piute Ponds from October 23-December 25 (Julie Rush). This species is quite rare in the county, largely due to a lack of suitable habitat. One can only imagine how many bitterns a wetland-riddled Los Angeles basin and coastline would have supported historically.

A **Little Blue Heron** found at Cabrillo Beach on October 26 continued there through December 26 (Bobby Trusela).

**Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** persisted in the Ballona area, with one to two birds seen at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh and on the Ballona Creek mouth breakwater through December 2.

On November 8, a **Masked Booby** flew past Pt. Vicente (Graham Montgomery). Interestingly this was the only booby recorded during the period at a time when their incursions into more northerly latitudes are becoming more frequent.

Seven **California Condors** south of Pyramid Lake on December 13 was a notable concentration (Naresh Satyan).

**Broad-winged Hawks** were at Banning Park in Wilmington on November 1 and at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates from December 4-22, with the latter likely to winter (both Johnny Ivanov).

Once virtually unheard of in winter, records of **Swainson's Hawks** in that season are increasing. Late birds were along the Los Angeles River in Long Beach on November 6 and at Hopkins Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach on November 10 (Joyce Brady) and east of Three Points on November 20 (Naresh Satyan). Two more were at Hansen Dam on November 15 (Luke Tiller, David Bell) and single birds were in the east Antelope Valley from November 22-23 (Graham Montgomery) and in Pasadena on November 24 (Luke Tiller). Potentially wintering was one at Hansen Dam on December 25 (Jon Fisher).

At least two **Zone-Tailed Hawks** were in the San Gabriel Valley area, with reports including one continuing in Monrovia through November 12, one at the Los Angeles County Arboretum on November 6 (Catherine Hamilton) and another in Altadena on November 17 (Sarah Ngo).

Rare for the county was a "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** in the Ballona area from December 16-24 (Kevin Lapp). There have been but a half dozen records of this subspecies in the country over the past decade.

Also very scarce in the county was a **Rough-legged Hawk** at Quail Lake from December 13-24 (Kimball Garrett, David Bell). Records over the past decade can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

A **Long-eared Owl** was captured for rehabilitation in Malibu Creek State Park on November 15. Though considered rare in most of the county, due to its retiring nature this owl is probably more common than records would indicate.

**Short-eared Owls** were at Madrona Marsh in Torrance on October 27 (Sara Boscoe), at different locations in the east Antelope Valley on November 22 (Mark & Janet Scheel) and on December 20 (David Bell) and at Peck Road Park in Arcadia on November 23 (Dessi Sieburth).

**Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were at Rancho Sierra Golf Course in the Antelope Valley from October 23-24 (Chris Dean), at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates from November 19-December 19 (Manuel Duran, Alejandra Cedillo), at the Los Angeles County Arboretum in Arcadia on December 5 (Darren Dowell) and along Zuma Creek on December 20 (Dessi Sieburth, Frank & Susan Gilliland).

A **Nuttall's x Ladder-backed Woodpecker** was in Juniper Hills from November 10-December 24 (Kimball Garrett). Ladder-backed Woodpeckers rarely wander from their desert haunts, but Nuttall's are found with regularity in the Antelope Valley. Hybrids in this area are rare but noted occasionally.

Northern Flickers appear on most bird lists from October through March, but rare subspecies often pique birders' interest as much as any other unusual bird. As such, **Northern "Yellow-shafted" Flickers** were at Stephen Sorenson Park in Lake Los Angeles on October 23 (Kimball Garrett), at Castaic Lagoon on October 29 (Jeffrey Fenwick), at Tierra Bonita Park in Lancaster from December 18-19 (Alex Coffey), at Henrietta Basin in Torrance on December 19 (Calvin Bonn) and at the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys on December 26 (Rebecca Marschall).

Pale **"Prairie" Merlins** were at the Hansen Dam spreading basins on November 7 (Brad Rumble) and at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on December 13 (Darren Dowell). A **"Black" Merlin** – the county's rarest subspecies- had returned for another winter to the Bette Davis Picnic Area in Glendale as of November 23 (Jon Fisher) and remained in the area through December 12.

A **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** returned for a second winter to Heartwell Park in Long Beach and was seen there from December 9-26 (Kim Moore, Becky Turley). **Ash-throated Flycatchers** were at Madrona Marsh through December 22 and at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach from December 9-26 (Brad Dawson).

Very rare was a **Great Crested Flycatcher** found at Columbia Park in Torrance on October 24 (Kiera Carvalho). How rare? This was the first county record since 1998. The few birders who rushed to see this bird the day it was found were in luck. To the chagrin of many others, this prized vagrant had vanished by the following morning.

Also a great county rarity was a **Brown-crested Flycatcher** returning for a second winter at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates. It was first observed on November 30 and reported through December 18 (Johnny Ivanov). Another was discovered at Michigan Park in Whittier on December 25 (Eddie Monson).

**Tropical Kingbirds** continued at Entradero Park in Torrance through December 26, at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City through December 3 and at Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach through December 13.

The **Thick-billed Kingbird** that spent the past seven winters at Horsethief Canyon Park in San Dimas was back for another encore appearance as of December 8 and was reported there through December 24 (Keith Condon).

Late **Western Kingbirds** were at Whittier Narrows in South El Monte on November 29 (Layton Pace), at Madrona Marsh in Torrance from December 16-18 (Johnny Ivanov) and at Rynerson Park in Lakewood on December 25 (Lindsay & John Fitch). A closely-related **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** was at Central Park in Westchester on November 30 (Don Sterba).

The **Greater Pewee** at Rustic Canyon in Pacific Palisades was reported only through October 30. But it has proven difficult to locate and will likely remain through the winter.

It was a good period for late and/or wintering *Empidonax*. An above average seven **Hammond's Flycatchers** were detected, but far less expected at this time of year was a **Dusky Flycatcher** at Stephen Sorenson Park in Lake Los Angeles from November 22-December 23 (Dessi Sieburth, Frank & Susan Gilliland). With over twenty recorded, **Gray Flycatchers** were downright common at a time of year when the vast majority have headed south. In addition, seven **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** were found. Whether these numbers are an aberration, a result of climate change or a function of increased coverage is difficult to know; at least with such limited data.

An **Eastern Phoebe** returned for a second winter along the Los Angeles River in Glendale as of November 4 and reported there through December 24 (Greg Slak). Another was at the Rolling Hills landfill from December 2-20 (Manuel Duran, Alejandra Cedillo) and one was at Lake Balboa in the San Fernando Valley on December 19 (Kris Ohlenkamp).

While on the subject of flycatchers, at least three dozen **Vermilion Flycatchers** were recorded in November and December. A decade ago, the number for the same period was ten percent of that. The recent expansion of this species into the coastal slope of the county has been dramatic.

A **Bell's Vireo** at the South Coast Botanic Gardens from December 16-29 (Teresa Palos) was noteworthy, as there are few winter records of this species in the state.

Remarkable was a **Gray Vireo** at Stephen Sorenson Park in Lake Los Angeles on November 20 (William Tyrer). This species is a rare, infrequent and local breeder in the county and is about equally rarely encountered as a migrant.

Becoming quite scarce after October, **Cassin's Vireos** were in Juniper Hills in the Antelope Valley on November 10 (Kimball Garrett), at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood from November 2-December 7 (Merryl Edelstein), at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale on December 2 (Dessi Sieburth) and at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds from December 6-9 (Corey Husic).

Quite interesting was a **Verdin** at Alta Vicente Reserve in Rancho Palos Verdes from November 17-19 (Manuel Duran, Alejandra Cedillo). This is one of very few coastal slope records of this typically desert species. Interestingly, there are three recent records from this general area in the past five years.

A **Pacific Wren** was in Little Santa Anita Canyon above Sierra Madre from December 19-21 (Lance Benner).

San Clemente Island had a **Red-throated Pipit** from October 23-29 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers). Another-accessible to the remainder of county birders- was at Heartwell Park in Long Beach from December 11-17 (Johnny Ivanov).

A *japonicus* **American Pipit** was at the Ferraro Soccer Fields in Glendale from December 16-23 (Andrew Birch). Very few of this Asian subspecies occur on the west coast in fall.

**Lapland Longspurs** were at Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach from December 11-13 (Robb Hamilton), on San Clemente Island from October 23-29 and again on November 29 and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was there on October 24 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers).

**Grasshopper Sparrows** were at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale on November 15 (Frank & Susan Gilliland), at Triunfo Creek Park in Westlake from December 20-22 (Mark & Janet Scheel) and at Leo Carrillo State Park on December 22 (Graham Montgomery).

**Clay-colored Sparrows** continued in well above average numbers, with close to twenty detected during the period.

A **"Red" Fox Sparrow** was at Griffith Park from December 11-13 (Brad Rumble).

**Swamp Sparrows** were at Castaic Lagoon from November 3-26 (Cal Yorke) along the Los Angeles River in Glendale from December 1-23 (Andrew Birch), with two confirmed there on December 23 (Ryan Terrill), and at Quail Lake from December 6-13 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

A **"Large-billed" Savannah Sparrow** was at a favored location- the Ballona Creek mouth jetties- on October 24 (Lock Kilpatrick). Though this subspecies is quite rare in the county, this has been a reliable spot for them over the years.

At least eight **Dark-eyed "Pink-sided" Juncos** and over a dozen **Dark-eyed "Gray-headed" Juncos** were present over the period. Both subspecies were present in higher than usual numbers.

A great find was a **Dark-eyed "Red-Backed" Junco** at Domenic Massari Park in Palmdale from November 6-8 (Kimball Garrett). Though very similar to the Gray-headed form, the distribution of Red-backed is more southerly, and there are subtle morphological differences. Not only was this a first county record, but only the second for the state.

A **Harris's Sparrow** was on San Clemente Island on November 16 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers), while about a dozen **White-throated Sparrows** were present during the period. About ten **Green-tailed Towhees** recorded over the period was an above average number.

Ubiquitous in spring and summer but rare in winter, **Hooded Orioles** were at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino from December 7-19 (Dorian Charnis) and near Wheeler Park in Claremont on December 25 (Tom Miko).

Other orioles of note included a **Baltimore Oriole** at the South Coast Botanic Garden from December 10-20 (Johnny Ivanov) and six **Scott's Orioles**. Four of the latter were on the coastal slope and two were in the Antelope Valley where less expected in winter; one at Pearblossom Park in Pearblossom on December 18 (Kimball Garrett) and another in Llano on December 25 (Ruth Gravance).

A **Rusty Blackbird** San Clemente Island from November 29-December 29 was the only one reported (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers).

Two **Bobolinks** continued at Santa Fe Dam through November 3, with at least one lingering through November 18. Surprisingly, this location produced the only Bobolinks of the fall.

A **Northern Waterthrush** was along Medea Creek in Agoura Hills from November 5-24 (Dan Cooper), while eight **Black-and-white Warblers** were noted during the period. A **Tennessee Warbler** was on San Clemente Island on October 24 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers).

A **Lucy's Warbler** continued at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia through October 27 and others were on San Clemente Island on October 25 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers), at the Rio Hondo Spreading Basins in Pico Rivera from November 26-27 (Larry Schmahl) and in Highland Park on November 27 (Mayer Otto).

**Nashville Warblers** are common migrants but very scarce by November. Single birds were at the Piute Ponds from November 10-12 (Chris Dean), at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on November 13 (Matt Felperin), at Peck Road Park in Arcadia through November 14 and at Heartwell Park in Long Beach from December 12-26 (Larry Schmahl).

One of the rarest of winter warblers was a **MacGillivray's Warbler** near Wheeler Park in Claremont. It was first seen on December 6 and reported through December 19 (Tom Miko).

**American Redstarts** were at Wheeler Park in Claremont on October 25 (Tom Miko), at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood on November 29 (Christine Jacobs) and at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach from December 20-24 (Calvin Bonn).

A **Bay-breasted Warbler** was on Santa Catalina Island on October 24 (Tom Benson) and about a dozen **Palm Warblers** were recorded over the period, while the Piute Ponds hosted a **Black-throated Green Warbler** from October 29-30 (Chris Dean).

A **Canada Warbler**, likely injured, was in Sun Valley from late October through November 3 (Betina Loder milk).

Returning for a second winter to Inglewood Park Cemetery was a **Painted Redstart** first seen on December 12 and present through December 24 (John Chapple).

**Summer Tanagers** were at Wardlow Park in Long Beach through December 24, continuing at the Village Green Condominiums in Los Angeles through October 25, at Veteran's Park in Sylmar on November 11 (Mickey Long), at American Gold Star Manor

in Long Beach on November 16 (Richard Barth) and at Madrona Marsh on November 24.

Late and potentially wintering **Black-headed Grosbeaks** were in Glendora from November 25-December 10 and in Pasadena from November 7-December 7 (Frank & Susan Gilliland). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Horsethief Canyon Park in San Dimas on December 10 (Keith Condon). Rare at this time was a **Blue Grosbeak** along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on December 1 (Richard Barth, Jeff Boyd)

Late **Lazuli Buntings** were on San Clemente Island from October 24-27 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers) and in the Sepulveda Basin on November 4 (Candice Byers). Always a good find was a **Painted Bunting** at Hopkins Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach from November 8-10 (Manuel Duran). Due to their attractive plumage, sighting of males of this species raise the possibility of an escaped cage bird, but this female-type bird was most likely a genuine vagrant.

After such a great November and December for birds, we must remind ourselves that many of the vagrants encountered as well as our common resident species are at risk.

Given the very real concern about declining bird numbers, we as birders are in a unique position to make contributions that can aid and support conservation efforts.

Citizen science in the form hundreds of birders in Los Angeles County are documenting the changes in avifauna that are occurring over time. I can't think of any other area where it is possible for amateurs to add to the scientific record, and while doing what they most enjoy to boot. Without eBird, this would be next to impossible. To that end, submitting complete field lists with accurate species counts and identifications is essential.

Coming up soon— early spring migrants. Turkey Vultures and Rufous Hummingbirds, Sage Thrashers and swallows are among the earliest and all will be in evidence by February. Waterfowl will also start heading north and the amazing cycle and spectacle of spring migration will play out. The spring and fall migration periods are the highlights of the year for most birders and an excellent time to be in the field. 🐦

# OUTDOOR EDUCATION

## Cruising Up & Down the Coast, Checking-out the Spots That I Love Most

By Cindy Hardin, Director of Outdoor Education | Photos by Margot Griswold and the Author



*One of the winter visitors recently seen at the Bolsa Chica Wetlands, the magnificent White Pelican. | Photo credit: Margot Griswold*

*2020 HAS BEEN A YEAR THAT HAS SEEN MUCH UPENDING OF THE WORLD AND ITS CITIZENS. BUT THERE IS CONSISTENCY TO BE FOUND IN THE NATURAL WORLD, and for me, that is a great source of comfort. Nature does not know that a pandemic is raging around the world, and continues to go about its business, in all its wonder, every single day.*

*Time spent outdoors can be quite the antidote for the sagging spirit. Southern California abounds in locations that remind us of the beauty of our state, and that there is a larger whole to the world than the niche that is occupied by us humans. What follows is a list of some of my favorite spots to step back, experience the natural world and be inspired rather than discouraged. Each place listed is within a two-hour drive of downtown Los Angeles, with the exception of the final listing. Some are extremely local. And all should be a tonic to malaise!*

*We will go from north to south. Each site could be done as a day trip, or combined as a multi-day nature vacation once traveling becomes a real possibility again.*

*All of these excursions can be done safely if current protocols are followed. We all know the drill: explore with members of your own household (or solo!), wear a mask, and keep proper distance when others are encountered. That said, all of these spots, save for Serrano Canyon, have paths wide enough to avoid close contact with strangers.*

*Every spot listed offers fantastic opportunities to walk, and some are well suited for a two-wheel tour-on a bicycle! A bike and a bike rack allow expanded mobility, and a chance to feel like a kid again. This option will also be described below, when applicable.*



**COAL OIL POINT RESERVE-** Located at the far north end of the campus of UC Santa Barbara, Coal Oil Point is a nesting site for the threatened Western Snowy Plover. It includes a beautiful beach that is the starting point of the Gaviota Coast, coastal dunes and seasonal ponds and a freshwater slough on the inland side of the dunes. Beautiful any time of year, the Reserve is especially thrilling in Springtime, when the baby Snowy Plovers are running about, learning from their parents how to forage for insects in the kelp wrack. There is a lot with permit parking available, which can be accessed by taking Storke Road/Glen Annie exit off the 101 Freeway. After Storke hits El Colegio continue forward, as at this point it will turn into Slough Road. Signage will direct you to the day parking lot.

**Bike option:** Exit 101 north at Fairview Road, go right. Make a left at the next stoplight on to Calle Real, and park at the dead end. You will see the entrance to the bike path; bear left at the first crossing. The path follows a creek, and leads along Goleta State Beach onto the campus of UCSB. Ride through the campus to pick up Sabado Tarde, and follow it to its end. Enter the bluff trail, ride along the bluff and terminate at the entrance to Coal Oil Point and the Reserve.

**CARPINTERIA SALT MARSH-** This is almost 300 acres of wetlands that have been restored over the past 20 years or so. There is a walking path around the perimeter of the marsh, with great signage that explains the history and geology of the land, and the species of plants and animals

that are found there. Park as closely as possible to the corner of Ash and Sandyland.

**Bike Option:** After covering the perimeter trail on foot, take your bike south along the beach and enter the trail that runs along the back edge of Carpinteria State Park. This will take you to the Carpinteria Bluffs-more beautiful open space. If your trip is taken in the springtime you can observe the Harbor Seal rookery on the beach, below the bluffs. Adorable seal pups can be seen scooting about, and learning to swim in the shallows.

**CARPINTERIA BLUFFS-** You can still access the bluffs even if you don't have a bike! There is a parking lot located at the intersection of Bailard Road and Carpinteria Avenue. Park in the lot and follow the meandering paths through restored Coastal Sage Scrub habitat. Head towards the north end, cross the railroad tracks and look for seals on the beach.

**SYCAMORE CANYON-** This is part of Point Mugu State Park, located just north of County Line, and covers both sides of Pacific Coast Highway. Past the campground on the inland side is a fire road that goes all the way up the canyon, terminating in the valley at Satwiwa Park, about 8 miles. The road crosses Sycamore Creek numerous times, and massive Sycamore Trees, stands of native Oak and Willows are found all along the trail. One mile in you will find the trailhead for Serrano Canyon, which follows Serrano Creek. Great place for spring wildflowers, and in past years Red Tail Hawks have nested on a rock ledge that can be seen about two miles in along the creek. If you are feeling ambitious you can continue on the Serrano Creek trail, as it will loop you back to the Fire Road further up the canyon.

**Bike Option:** The Fire Road is a wide and easy bike ride. Around six miles in the road will start a steep ascent- I lock my bike to the side of the trail at that point, go up the last section of road on foot, and then bear right once I get to Satwiwa. This trail will take you back down along another creek, and you will pop out where you parked your bike!

**MALIBU LAGOON-** Malibu Lagoon is one of those iconic spots along our coast, so famous that it is known far and wide. A controversial restoration was done here several years ago; opinions vary on levels of its success. Nevertheless, it is a great spot to stop if you are working your way



*Lots of great information in signage found throughout the Carpinteria Salt Marsh*



*The jetty where Ballona Creek meets the sea.*

down the coast, and lots of birds are to be seen here, including (at times) the Western Snowy Plover. There is also a terrific 3-D model of the Malibu watershed at the start of the trail that leads to the beach. Lagoon, Coastal Sage Scrub and Beach areas make this a great trifecta of native habitat.

**BALLONA CREEK, LAGOON, JETTY, WETLANDS AND FRESHWATER MARSH-** Closer to home, we have the last coastal wetland within the city limits of Los Angeles. Public access to the wetlands themselves is quite limited, and currently, due to Covid-19 restrictions, completely off the table. However, there is a fair amount of street parking in Playa del Rey, especially in the morning hours, and lots to see. The Lagoon is a good starting point, and heading north will take you to the Ballona Creek Jetty. Recently there have been loads of Winter Migratory birds present, including Surfbirds, Elegant Terns, Oystercatchers and multiple gull species along the jetty and adjacent beach. If you turn back and head east on the jetty you will be able to peer through the fence and get a peek at Ballona. The Freshwater Marsh, located at the corner of Jefferson and Lincoln, is also full of winter birds. Look for ducks, warbler species and White Crown Sparrows at this spot.

*Bike Option:* Ballona Creek Bike Path runs along the north side of the creek, all the way to Culver City and the Baldwin Hills. There are multiple entrances to the bike path, and as you get closer to the ocean, you will pass by both Area C and Area A of the Ballona Wetlands. Great birding to be had

on the creek along the path, especially west of Centinela during low tide.

**BOLSA CHICA WETLANDS AND BOLSA CHICA STATE BEACH-** Our neighbor to the south includes the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, which is twice the size of Ballona and accessible



*Ridgway's Rail ( say that three times fast!) at Bolsa Chica.*



*A pair of Snow Geese on a re-fueling stop at Crystal Cove State Park.*

to the public from dawn to dusk. Miles of hiking trails, upland habitat, great views from the upper mesa and birds, birds, birds! Make sure to get over to the “pocket wetland”, just south of and below the mesa, where a gorgeous flock of White Pelicans has been spending the winter. And keep an eye out for the resident Osprey, who loves to use the snag above the pocket wetland to roost and shred its fish breakfast. Parking is available off Warner Avenue and PCH, and also on the inland side of PCH, opposite the main entrance to Bolsa Chica State Beach.

*Bike Option:* Huntington Beach is the only city in Orange County that did not ever allow development along the ocean side of Pacific Coast Highway, save for one outlier condo complex next to the pier. This means that there is 11 miles of off-road designated bike path along the sand. There are areas of beautifully restored dune habitats in the Bolsa Chica State Beach section of the path, and ocean views, which on clear days includes stunning vistas of Catalina, all along the path. Dolphins are a common sight and lots of birds are always present! Least Terns breed in the summer months in the wetlands across the highway, and also just before the Santa Ana River at the south end of Huntington-their sounds are cacophonous when they are present!

**CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK-** Lots of options here at this coastal gem, which stretches three and half miles between Newport Beach and Laguna Beach. There are walking paths that wander through the bluffs that have been beautifully restored with Coastal Sage Scrub habitat, and the beach offers wide stretches of sand and great tidepool viewing at low tide. At the south end you will find El Moro Canyon, which provides access to hiking

trails up this coastal canyon. You can hike straight up the canyon, or bear right a mile up from the parking lot and pick up the El Moro Ridge loop. A four-mile loop hike will take you high up the ridge, with stunning coastal views and loads of native habitat.


*Bike option:* The hiking paths on the bluff top can also be used as a bike path, although I prefer to take it slow on this trail and watch for wildflowers and great birds, like the California Thrasher.

**LA JOLLA COVE-** Another great stop as you work your way down the coast to our final destination. The highlight here can be found underwater! That’s right-amidst the bustle of La Jolla Village is a protected cove that abounds with sea life. Lots of parking all around the adjacent bluff top park, and stairways down to the cove provide easy access. Our state ocean fish, the Garibaldi, is present looking like giant goldfish in this natural aquarium, and juvenile sea lions frolic and show off their water prowess. In summer time the water is warm enough that all that is required is snorkel and fins; winter requires a wetsuit. And even if you don’t get in the water, the coastal views are excellent, and sea lions can be seen from the bluffs above.

**IMPERIAL BEACH, TIJUANA RIVER NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE-** our final stop, and the last coastal town before the United States turns into Mexico. Imperial Beach is a throwback to the coastal towns of my youth, and still has the atmosphere of a real surf town, complete with many delicious taco options. The Reserve is located at the far south end of town, and you are able to walk along the beach to the mouth of the Tijuana River. Plenty of inland trails throughout the Reserve as well, and a great Visitors’ Center that, although currently closed due to pandemic restrictions, provides an overview of the Reserve and lots of information about this very special place.

*Bike option:* At the north end of Imperial Beach there is an off-road bike path that runs along the coastal strand all the way to Coronado Island. Lots of wetland habitat on the inland side, and beautiful beaches on the coastal side. There is also a side spur that will take you inland to the Otay River, which is also a Reserve. Pack a lunch so you can take a sustenance break-if you make it all the way to Coronado and back you will cover about 18 miles!

**NOTE:** The directions that I am providing are quite general. However, with the magic of Google you can find more information and detailed trail maps of all of the above spots. Also, many mentioned are part of our wonderful State Park System, which means paid entry fees. I highly recommend the purchase of an Annual Pass, which costs \$200.00. This will cover your parking fees at every State Park in California, and help to support our Parks, as every dollar of your park pass purchase goes directly to the parks. I usually make back what I spend on my pass within seven months of purchase. Bonus: if you buy your pass at the beginning of the month, it will be good for thirteen months, not twelve!

I hope this article inspires you to get outside and step away from the glowing screen. Screen time has increased for many of us as a necessity, as we try to do our jobs from our house, and official studies and anecdotal evidence indicate this is not great for our health! Outdoors is where it's at, and is always a benefit to our physical, mental and emotional state. So try to get out there! take a deep breath of fresh air and enjoy! 



*The bluffs of Crystal Cove State Park with spring wildflowers.*

# INTERPRETING NATURE

## NATURE IN THE CITY | By Brian Young

This issue's Interpreting Nature column was created by Brian Young. Brian is a Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program alumnus. He recently returned from completing his degree at UC Santa Cruz to re-join the staff team at Los Angeles Audubon - we are very glad to have him back! Brian brings a wide range of interests and skill sets to his work as a restoration and education staff member, helping students make connections between science, art, and stewardship. Hopefully we can talk him into creating more nature comics for the Tanager in the future!



# Bird-Protective Reflective-Garden

By Tiffany Larsen

I LOVE BIRDS. I LOVE MY CAT. I LOVE MY GARDEN. SOME WOULD SAY THAT these are the ingredients for a perfect storm of potential bird carnage. However, with a little research, ingenuity, and diligence I believe that I have minimized the risk for my feathery friends.

My dream is to someday build a “Catio”, which is a secure, large, and glorified cage that is attached to the side of a house, with a cat-door or flap. Cats can come and go as they please, which is ideal, because as the saying goes, “A cat is always on the wrong side of the door”. A catio allows them to sit outside when they want to and enjoy some fresh air, and if a lovely sunbeam happens to shine down, they can go out and warm their fur in splendid style. The cat is safe from predators, and the cat is prevented from becoming a predator as well. Hopefully I’ll manage to build this in another month or two. There is a wonderful company in Los Angeles that can build any size catio, in case anyone is interested in pursuing this option: <https://www.customcatios.com/catios/>

Until my dream of catio-utopia comes true, I have created a rather garish, but successful, reflective garden which discourages birds from entering my backyard. It is a little reminiscent of The Stravinsky Fountain next to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, France, but not quite as elaborate. (...and

I also do not have a 16th century Gothic church in the background, more’s the pity!).

**First step:** After a bit of internet research on “How to discourage birds from entering your garden”, I learned that birds do not like shiny, moving objects and the sight of potential predators. So, I bought some spinning reflective disks from a garden center. A few of the discs have large predatory-bird eyes painted on to them, which look scary even to a human, so I’m pretty sure that the birds’ self-preservation instincts are activated and they stay away. I put loops of Aluminum foil around a few branches that are easily moved about in the wind. I bought an old statue of an owl at a garage sale and placed it in an open and visible area. I hung up two sparkly disco-type shirts (once used as Halloween costumes), and some old mirrors, that spin around with the breeze. Every morning I place a collection of several ceramic and stuffed-toy cats and dogs in the yard which hopefully looks (to a bird passing overhead) like an intimidating den of carnivorous beasts.

**Second step:** In the morning I place a collar with a bell on my cat’s neck. Every time she runs or moves, you can hear it tingle. I take the collar off every evening so that she doesn’t have to hear that annoying bell ringing every time she turns over in her sleep (which helps me as well, because she usually sleeps so close to me that I can barely move).

**Finally,** the most important aspect to my bird-protection plan is that *I never leave the cat outside unaccompanied*. Luckily, she follows me wherever I go, so this is easily accomplished. If I ever do see any birds nearby, I quickly grab a large mirror that I pivot and shake with both hands so that the light of the sun acts like a beacon of warning. When the birds see this flashing light they take off instantly in all of their winged glory.

So far, I have nary a sad story to report! The cat gets to enjoy a lovely, yet bizarre looking, garden and I am able to sit outside and enjoy my garden with my cat by my side.

I hope that catios will eventually be a regular feature on any dwellings lucky enough to have a cat in residence. Until then, I hope my fellow bird- and cat-loving compatriots will join me in this noble endeavor to protect our feathered and furry friends in any way that we can.....all it takes is diligence, some shiny, spinning objects, and a little bit of old-fashioned bird sense!



*Tiffany Larsen is an animal lover, quixotic dreamer, and clandestine opera singer. She has worked as an Executive Assistant, Copywriter, and Editor in California, Florida and Paris, France. She has a B.A. in Psychology from UC Irvine. Email: VerseauTiff27@gmail.com*

## Bird Walk

By Linda Sheehan



*Photo courtesy of Read Howarth*

Leaves fluttered and whipped in the desert wind. The cottonwoods, tall signposts of water and life, usually held the birder's gaze as binos and cameras caught glimpses of feathers and flights. Necks craned painfully to catch sight of the sleepy owl reported in the palm tree recesses. All that was seen was the long dribbles of guano giving away the elusive bird's resting spot. A bluebird flock swung crazily in the now increasing onslaught of the Santa Ana. Blue skies were a memory as the clouds covered the sun again and again. Fleeces testified to a winter coolness in the high desert and hands were rubbed and quickly returned to pockets after searching in vain for a spotters excited call. '

What was it?"


"Could have been a Coopers."

"Well darn and he scared what few birds were out."

The group moved on. More intense discussion replaced idle chatter as heads bowed and hands remained in pockets. Groups of two or three talked of previous birding walks and rarities. An occasional spotting of white crown sparrows popping out of bushes received only a nod or two. The birders talked of mutual friends, the sad state of a world with diminishing birdlife, exciting trips to far flung places to see, what else,

birds, and most importantly where to have lunch. And so, they walked through the rest of the usual places. Trees and spots had been named for the continued sightings of perhaps a woodpecker or phoebe; the 'sapsucker tree' or the telephone post that usually held a kestrel.

The yellowed fall leaves crunched underfoot. The wind died down and the blue patches of sky broadened. None of the birders wanted to be any other place than this small preserve. Nature enfolded them and helped them understand that the birds and lizards go about their lives in a measured sometimes fatal regularity. Food, nesting, procreation, raising young, molting, eat or be eaten and occasional 'flights of fancy. As a permanently amateur birder I relish the understanding of how each creature builds upon each other. Where would we be without the insects? Our flock of human observers may put us on some sort of pyramidal 'top,' but we know a circle is more like it. The 'bottom creatures' suddenly become the force filling the sails as the hapless mariner can only grab the handrails and become the hunted.

A sudden shout disturbed the group and like a flock of pigeons we all turned toward the raised pointed hand. Binoculars to our eyes, we caught the eye-popping sight of perching bluebirds, their backs facing the sun, a most glorious blue. Our lives became just a little brighter. 



*Photo courtesy of All About Birds*

# ENCOUNTERS WITH NATURE

By Judith Deutsch

**T**ODAY, MORE THAN EVER, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE SHOW RESPECT for nature and the world around us. Whether we share it with birds, reptiles, mammals, or micro-organisms, such as the Coronavirus, we need to understand and appreciate that we are not the only residents on earth.

I am thrilled that California has begun work on a migratory pathway for our native mountain lions to provide safe passage over heavily trafficked roadways, allowing for more genetic diversity.

In the 1970s, I worked at the J. Paul Getty Villa in Malibu, California, and during summers staff parked along the hillside to leave parking spaces for visitors. I came out one evening to find what I thought was a large dog sleeping on the hood of my burgundy Fiat. At 98 pounds and a height of 5 '3", I moved to within 5 feet to tell him to "scat." Imagine my surprise when he unfurled a long tail and turned a cat's face to me! I spread my arms to make myself look larger (I learned this in Girl Scouts), made eye contact, backed up, wished him a lovely nap, and returned to my lab. An hour later, he was gone. The cats tend to come down looking for water, and he must have just eaten before taking his nap.

I also had a vegetarian coyote visit my organic garden in Mar Vista. He left the garden cats alone but dug up carrots and greens to eat. I suspect he was a pet dropped off in the mountains when he grew too large to keep. A barn owl now has a home in my neighbor's yard, and a ring-tailed hawk visits us, regularly. Crows, ravens, hawks, and squirrels share the trees in the park where I walk. Each group has staked out its own real estate. We need to continue to share our space and accommodate wildlife to the best of our ability, using our heads when we meet them, whether unintentional or by design. 🐦



*Judith Deutsch is a bit of a renaissance woman. She began her career in art conservation at the J. Paul Getty Museum, continued on to a career in fundraising for the arts, education and healthcare, is an artist, educator, historian, editor, ghostwriter, nature lover, bibliophile and world traveler, and is starting a personal chef business. She sails and is a hunter-jumper horsewoman.*



# A Case of Mistaken Identity

By Michael H. Lester

My father comes to Los Angeles from Detroit for one of his annual fall visits. Up in years, his hearing and eyesight are not what they used to be.

While in the kitchen preparing dinner, I notice through the bay window an owl perched on top of the utility pole. It is a very unusual sight for our urban backyard, and I excitedly point it out to my father, who, squinting through the thickening fog, insists it is not an owl but a cat.

sphinxlike  
twisting its head right to left  
a creature  
of shadowy origins  
surveys its domain

After a moment of futile argument between us, I look my father squarely in the eye and propose a solution.

*If it climbs down the pole, it must be a cat, but if it flies off into the sunset, it must be an owl.  
Agreed?*

We can agree on that much, at least, although I get the distinct feeling father is looking for holes in my argument.

We turn back towards the window to begin our vigil, but the owl, or cat, is gone.

all night  
the flapping of wings  
echoes in my head  
father with a flashlight  
scours the earth for paw prints

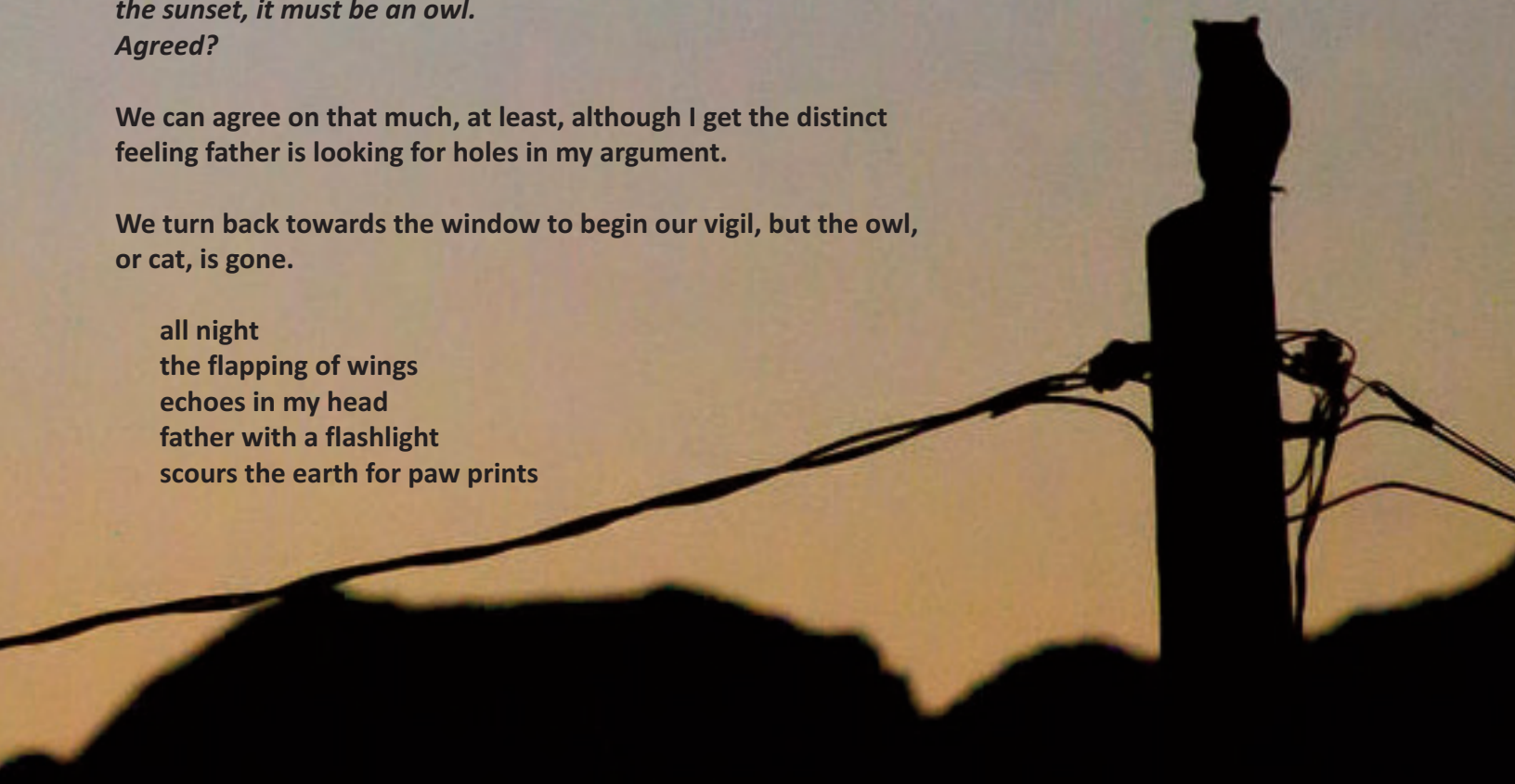


Photo courtesy of Boulder City Review | Photo by: Coyote Freitag