

the wrentit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 73 · NO. 4 | APRIL-MAY 2025



Swinhoe's White-eye Munching on Cherry Blossoms. © Lynzie Flynn

president's perch 

SEEKING SERENITY OUTDOORS By Luke Tiller

In the last edition of *The Wrentit*, I wrote a piece about the wonderful walk we had held at Eaton Canyon in January, little knowing that it would be the last Pasadena Audubon Society event there for quite some time. The heartbreaking loss of their Nature Center and one of our most treasured birding locations for at least a couple of years also impacted another PAS project that was in development: a hummingbird feeder “cantina” that was planned for the center courtyard. The best laid plans of mice and men...

The Hummingbird Cantina, however, has already found a new home at The Gamble House in Pasadena (read more on page 3), and we are incredibly thankful to them for their kind offer to step in as the project's new home. The venture is mostly an educational one about/for these incredible birds, but it also offers an accessible spot for people who don't have the capacity to manage feeders. Having spent the last two months out of our house myself (a little fire and a lot of smoke damage), I have enjoyed the benches in this peaceful space a great deal. Plus, as an '80s kid, I get a little extra kick out of

watching hummingbirds at Doc Brown's house.

It's been a tough couple of months for many of our members, and my heart goes out to all those who have been impacted by the fire directly or have friends and family who have been impacted. The one small silver lining is how much the community has come together during this period. At times of grief, I have found nature restorative, and the serenity of the cantina and the water feature at The Gamble House has been a wonderful quiet place these last few weeks. I also find bird migration comforting in challenging times. The fact that it has gone on, little changed, for thousands of years, somehow places the stresses and strains of current life in perspective for me personally.

As a wildlife biologist I have worked in many places that have been impacted by fire and am always amazed by the number of animals that survive even seemingly devastating burns. As I cleaned up our house and yard, I was thrilled to see fresh shoots sprouting up from the roots of my charred native plants. Most of the beloved oaks have survived too. Eaton Canyon will

come back and be enjoyed again, of that there is no doubt.

Get Out Early

Spring is a wonderful time for birds, however you enjoy them. Local residents are vocal and flaunting themselves as we head into breeding season. Additionally, our summer visitors are starting to filter in, and passing migrants can be found seeking food and shelter as they wend their way northwards. With a little luck, even the smallest of urban parks can be packed to the gills with migrating birds.

One April day a couple of years back, I managed to tally an amazing 70 species in a few hours birding the 15 acres that make up Sunnyslope, Gwinn, and Viña Vieja Parks. Getting out early is the key to birding at this time of year in order to enjoy both the dawn chorus and nocturnal migrants which are active early, refueling after a grueling night of migration.

There are no bad places to be birding in these next couple of months. Just get outdoors and enjoy as much time in nature as you can.

Monthly Chapter Meetings

Zoom link at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings>

▶ WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16 7:00-8:30pm, Online

Saving the Yellow-billed Cuckoo with Nick Beauregard

Yellow-billed Cuckoo © SSRS



Yellow-billed Cuckoos used to be a common resident of California's riparian landscapes. But these days they are under increased threat, from everything from habitat loss to avian diseases. Nick Beauregard of the Southern Sierra Research Station in Kern County has spent years studying

these wonderful birds, and working to secure their future. Join Nick as he lays out the past, present, and future of one of our region's most beautiful and fascinating birds.

▶ WEDNESDAY, MAY 21 7:00-8:30pm, Online

Bringing Back the Passenger Pigeon



What if extinct species didn't have to stay extinct? It's not science fiction. Researchers are working right now on recreating long-lost animals from the tiniest preserved genetic samples. This month, Ben Novak from the research organization Revive & Restore will

tell us about his group's audacious plan to revive North America's most famous extinct bird: the Passenger Pigeon. Passenger Pigeon painting by John James Audubon.

Native Garden Tour

▶ SUNDAY, APRIL 6 10:00am-5:00pm

Theodore Payne Native Plant Garden Tour

The most anticipated native garden event of the year is a self-guided tour across Greater Los Angeles, with a stop at the PAS garden at the Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School (1520 N Raymond Ave, Pasadena, CA 91103). PAS Garden educator Alexi Bolton will be there to answer all your questions, and the campus will be open to PAS members and those holding event tickets (purchase here: <https://nativeplantgardentour.org/>).

Free Bird Walks

Check dates, places, and make reservations at:

www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips

All ages and birding levels are welcome. PAS members also enjoy free monthly bird walks at The Huntington and Los Angeles County Arboretum.

NEW - Bird Sit at the Gamble House - **April 12 and May 10** - 8:30 - 9:30am

Social

▶ APRIL 23, MAY 28, 5:00-8:00pm

Birds & Beers @ Wild Parrot Brewing Co.

2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena

Join us for birds, brews, and fun. Catch up with friends, make new ones, and enjoy board games—all while Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS!

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

▶ APRIL 8, MAY 13 7:00-8:30pm

Contact pasadenaudubon@gmail.com if you would like the Zoom link to attend.

chapter news

BIRD SCIENCE PROGRAM RETURNS TO SCHOOLS AFTER FIRES

By Kathy Degner

After the school closures and continuing scheduling disruptions, the Bird Science Program was back in our schools for the first time since the catastrophic Eaton Fire. February found us at Jackson Elementary, one of our hardest-hit (but still standing) schools in the district.

On our first day, we taught five third-grade classes about bird migration. The topic really hit home for these kids, since many of their schoolmates have had to migrate out of state due to the fire.

We then followed up a week later with BirdFest. Seven stations were set up in the auditorium where the kids could experience hands-on learning about birds. Stations included studying feathers through microscopes and hand lenses, comparing various kinds of nests, and taxidermy. We also brought out the famous Wheel of Birding, a woodpecker costume for photos, and a migration table dedicated to the relationship between Red Knots and horseshoe crabs.

We could track a Red Knot's 9,000-mile migration path on a globe, discuss the possible effects of both horseshoe crabs and Red Knots being threatened/angered, as well as touch actual horseshoe crab carapaces. This kind of hands-on learning promotes thought-provoking questions and discussions. It is a lot of fun for both students and docents alike.

Being back with the students and staff was cathartic for so many of us. While birds will always be our primary focus, during this time of fire recovery we just want to bring a sense of normalcy to our students. We didn't shy away from discussion about the fire. We want the students to know that we provide a safe space to talk about their feelings, and to find the same sense of hope and resilience from seeing birds in their community as we birders do.

Students from Jackson Elementary at BirdFest.



PAS Opens a Hummingbird 'Dive Bar' at The Gamble House

By Jared Nigro

As part of Pasadena Audubon Society's commitment to creating more community education spaces in the San Gabriel Valley, we proudly teamed up with The Gamble House this past February to create the Hummingbird Cantina, a feeder garden maintained by the PAS community.

Originally, the Hummingbird Cantina was planned for the Eaton Canyon Nature Center, but the devastating effects of January's Eaton Fire left PAS (and the hummingbirds) without a home. Fortunately, one week after the fires, Sheryl Scott, the director of communication and operations for The Gamble House Conservancy, learned about the idea and jumped on it. Within 24 hours, they opened their doors to PAS, and the Hummingbird Cantina found a new home.

The Community Impact

This environmental venture isn't easy. It requires daily cleaning and refilling of the feeders, as well as tracking of the hummingbird action. To help PAS staff with the work, a call for volunteers was made via e-mail and over 50 people jumped in to help (10 times as many volunteers as we needed!)

The Cantina Volunteers were quickly trained by PAS staff, and our great community education project kicked off officially on March 3. The hummingbirds weren't aware of our calendar, however, and the first visitor wasted no time, arriving as soon as the feeders were installed, nine days before the grand opening.

The team of volunteers is diverse, ranging in age from students to seniors, with shifts manned by singles and couples, and parents and their children. Every day, a volunteer gives half an hour to make this spot a home for our beloved hummingbirds.

The Gamble House was largely untracked on eBird, so volunteers and visitors are encouraged to record any bird sightings on eBird to expand our understanding of birds in Pasadena.

The passionate response from a wide range of community members was inspiring. Because of this, PAS plans to continue creating programs that engage, educate, and nourish both the people and the environment in the future.

A Team Effort

Pasadena Audubon Society wishes to thank The Gamble House Conservancy, staff and docents for all of their support throughout this ever-evolving experiment. Additionally, a \$5,000 grant was issued to PAS for the Hummingbird Cantina by the Pasadena Community Foundation for helping improve the local environment after the impacts of the Eaton Fire. The



© Learden Matthies

money will play out long-term as we continue to replenish supplies, feeders and cleaning products throughout the life of this garden.

A Serene Visit

If you are looking to feel inner peace and stillness, the Hummingbird Cantina is for you. It sits in the Nancy Greene Glass Memorial Garden behind The Gamble House Bookstore. From benches under the Coast Live Oaks, you'll have a stunning view of the historic 116-year-old house and its wide lawn as you observe the hummingbirds hovering near the fountain in front of you.

The Gamble House is a National Historic Landmark as one of the most well-preserved examples of American Arts and Crafts architecture. Owned by the city of Pasadena, it offers guided tours of the interior and the grounds, as well as charming gifts in the bookstore (opening times and prices: <https://gamblehouse.org/visit/>).

The Hummingbird Cantina is free to visit and open to the public all days of the week. There is signage available onsite to learn more about the different hummingbird species, and a QR code to scan to deep dive into how to start your own Hummingbird Cantina at home.

Join us for a Bird Sit:
April 12 and May 10 (8:30-9:30am)

Meet the Visitors

The four feeders at The Cantina will give hummingbirds access to food, especially during fall and spring migration.

There are the six species that frequent the region, some rarer than others:

Anna's Hummingbird · Year Round. Status: Common.

Allen's Hummingbird · Year Round. Status: Common.

Rufous Hummingbird · Spring and Fall migration. Fairly common in spring, uncommon to rare in fall.

Black-chinned Hummingbird · Spring/Summer. Status: Fairly Common

Costa's Hummingbird · Year Round. Status: Rare

Calliope Hummingbird · Mostly April. Status: Rare



Happy hour at The Gamble House.

© Luke Tiller

SOCIAL BIRDERS A Very Birdy Start to the Year

Words and photos by Sean Doorly

The Salton Sea Bird Festival took place on a clear, crisp January day, with Pasadena Audubon Society's president Luke Tiller and Catherine Hamilton guiding a tour with their friend and wildlife biologist Justyn Stahl (more about it on page 5).

In late February, Jodhan Fine, Omar Alui, and Mary Angel led the Young Birders Club on a field trip to Lower Arroyo Park. The day was filled with joy and excitement as the group spotted a wide variety of birds. Highlights included European Starlings, Anna's Hummingbirds, Phainopeplas, a Red-tailed Hawk, an Acorn Woodpecker, California Towhees,

American Goldfinches, and more.

Kicking off March with a moment of mindfulness, Helin Jung led Pasadena Audubon Society's first Bird-Sit at Arlington Garden. A bird sit invites participants to slow down, quietly observe bird behavior, and tune in to their vocalizations – a peaceful way to connect with nature.

Salton Sea Bird Festival



Ashok and Meera Boghani.



Attendees at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area.



Justyn Stahl and Catherine Hamilton.

Young Birders at Lower Arroyo Park



Young Birders on the park trail.



Scanning the trees in search of birds.



Young Birder Ella peers through the spotting scope.

Bird Sit at Arlington Garden



Helin Jung leads the Bird Sit.



Bird Sitters at the Garden.



William Hallstrom and Helin Jung.

What Happens When You Add Bards To 'Birds & Beers'

By Carl Matthies

On February 26, I emceed Pasadena Audubon Society's inaugural "Birds, Beers, & Bards," an evening of avian-inspired poetry at Wild Parrot Brewing Company. The concept proved as popular as most of my ideas. The PAS Bird Poets Society could probably hold its meetings in a phone booth. However, in addition to myself, field trip leader Jeff Hale accepted the challenge, and a couple others in attendance improvised some lines that they couldn't recall when asked to write them down for *The Wrentit*. I guess that's the downside of holding the event at a pub. Maybe we'll try again next year!



Carl Matthies reads his poetry at Birds & Beers.



Tom Mills, Dave Weeshoff, and Catherine Hamilton share a laugh.



Jodhan Fine and Omar Alui shake it out.

Smoke Alarm Clock

Peep! peep! peep!
Is that the smoke detector begging for batteries as I sleep?
Or could it be the brown clown from across the street
Dancin' in the dirt for a pre-dawn treat?
Yup, it's a California Towhee but does he know he
Woke me too damn early was it just to show me
How he shuffles his feet
To unearth all of the seeds that he's wanting to eat?

And I must concede that it's a pretty neat feat
But nonetheless, and as he probably has guessed
I think it best that he go elsewhere to digest
So I can invest in a little more rest
You see for people like me it brings the level of the fun up
When FeederWatch doesn't get started 'til after sun up!

- C. Matthies



The Biologist and the California Condor

It's emotional releasing a condor
So I gently attach your transponder
Though we now are a far
With the use of radar
I'll always know where you wander

- J. Hale



NEXT 'BIRDS & BEERS'

April 23 and May 28

Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS!

California Towhee & California Condor © Luke Tiller

COUNTING BIRDS, TELLING STORIES

More than 60 participants helped to count 154 species

by Jon Fisher

While the Christmas Bird Count celebrates its 125th year, our count is still something of a youngster. We held the 79th Pasadena-San Gabriel Valley CBC on December 14, 2024.

Over 60 participants were in the field covering 175 square miles, and the weather was typical for December in Southern California: mild and dry, partly cloudy, and generally quite pleasant.

Though our final species total of 154 is below the recent average of between 165 and 170, there were some nice surprises. An additional four species were seen during “count week” (the three days before and after count day). These don’t get included in the species total, but they do help paint a more accurate picture of the diversity of birds in our area.

The total number of birds reported was 17,380. This is slightly above the recent average, but about 30 percent less than counts in the 1980s and 1990s. On the face of it, this would seem to corroborate studies confirming long-term declines in North American birds, but data often needs to be interpreted in context and with historical perspective.

Long-time residents will remember—likely not too fondly—the large and malodorous duck farm that once bordered the 605 Freeway. Prior to its closing in 2001, it hosted many European Starlings; often with 10,000 or more recorded on the Pasadena CBC. Those birds have since dispersed to other areas. In the final year of the duck farm operation, starlings on the count numbered 10,271. On the first CBC after its closure, a mere 568 were recorded. Their numbers have remained near this level ever since.

If we remove those starling numbers from events in the '80s and '90s, no significant decline in total bird numbers on the count was registered over the last 40 years. Between 15,000 and 20,000 birds has been the average for decades.

For 2024, we were fortunate to have coverage of all regular areas, with many participants covering their usual locations. Familiarity with their respective spots has the effect of increasing the number of species detected.

CBC HIGHLIGHTS

Quite rare on the count (with just six previous records) was a **Common Goldeneye** along San Gabriel River (Jon Feenstra). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was at Belvedere Park Lake (Luke Tiller, Catherine Hamilton).

Despite the presence of acceptable habitat, waterfowl were unusually scarce this year. Just one **Cinnamon Teal**, a relatively common species, was found. **Northern Pintail** and **Lesser Scaup** were missed altogether.

Four **Virginia Rails** and a **Sora** along San Jose Creek

were nice additions (Feenstra). Both species are usually missed because of a scarcity of suitable habitat.

Shorebirds are rarely present in any numbers in the Pasadena-San Gabriel circle due to a lack of, well, shores. Yet we managed to find a total of eight species, with a rare winter **Solitary Sandpiper** in the Rio Hondo Flood Basin as an unexpected bonus (Naresh Satyan). This species had been recorded only once before on the count... in 1958! *Continue on page 7.*



Solitary Sandpiper: The only shorebird presented on the Rio Hondo on count day, so truly solitary.

© Naresh Satyan

Variety of Habitats, Greater Bird Diversity

A common theme is certain: the variety of habitats directly translates to a greater diversity of birds. Conversely, less habitat means fewer birds. The CBC data makes a strong argument for creating and restoring good habitat, as well as preserving.

While the few rare birds we find are naturally an exciting aspect of the count, they are not the most important one. The numbers of our more common and expected species truly tell the story. Variations in abundance, long-term increases and declines of bird populations, and the establishment of non-native species are the critical numbers tracked by the CBC.

The CBC is unusual in that birders, as non-scientists, can make a legitimate contribution to the scientific record. Birding is always fun, but birding with a purpose adds yet another dimension to the pursuit, and the CBC definitely provides us with a worthy purpose.

As the count coordinator and compiler for well over 30 years, I look forward to the CBC for many months. The mad rush of getting all our count areas assigned, venturing into the field on count day, anticipating what good birds might be found, and finally, the count night dinner and wrap-up are all rewarding aspects of the event.

As always, a great thank you to all the participants. The CBC is indisputably a group effort that could never happen without dozens of volunteers getting out in the field, counting birds and submitting their data. Their efforts help create an ever-changing picture of local birdlife, just as thousands of other counters do for their respective circles across the country.

Thanks also to Pasadena Audubon Society for supporting and sponsoring the CBC. Their efforts have significantly increased interest and turnout for the event. We know we'll need a new generation of counters in the coming years, and PAS support is a great way to ensure that we have them. It's still a long way off, but be sure to mark your calendar for the 2025 CBC, which will take place on Saturday, December 20.

What Is Christmas Bird Count?

The CBC is the longest-running bird survey in the world. It was devised as an alternative to Christmas “side hunts” where participants competed to shoot as many birds as possible. Now under the auspices of the National Audubon Society, the CBC has over 70,000 participants in about 2,400 counts around the world.

A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** along the Rio Hondo established just the third count record (Satyan). Previously, one was found on the 2020 event and another was spotted during count week in 2023. This species is rapidly increasing locally and across North America, so we should see more records in the years to come.

Neotropical Cormorants are also increasing in range and numbers and are now expected locally. It’s notable that this tropical species was unrecorded in the county before 2016, yet the 2024 event tallied no fewer than 17 individuals.

White-faced Ibis is a good bird for our CBC, with only about a half dozen previous records. Above average numbers have been on the coastal slope this fall though, so it wasn’t too surprising that single birds were found at three different locations.

Northern Harriers can be difficult to find in the circle, thus one at Santa Fe Dam (Omar Alui) and another at Ernest E. Debs Regional Park (Clara Thomas) were welcome additions. Another good raptor was a **Zone-tailed Hawk** over Monrovia (Jack Wickel).

Often missed was a **Barn Owl** tallied at night (Van Pierszalowski). Another good find was a **Northern Pygmy-Owl** near Mt. Wilson (Lance Benner). Unless one simply gets lucky, it takes effort and determination to track down this species, despite its diurnal habits.

Frequently absent were two **Red-naped Sapsuckers** found during count week, along with six of the more common **Red-breasted Sapsuckers** observed on count day.

Fairly common as a migrant but quite rare in winter was a **Hammond’s Flycatcher** along San Jose Creek (Feenstra). Eleven **Vermilion Flycatchers** were also found. This species has increased markedly on the coastal slope over the past decade and this change in status is reflected in the data.

A rare record was a **Tropical Kingbird** at the Rio Hondo Flood Basin (Satyan). There are just seven previous count records, with six of those a returning wintering bird at Legg Lake from 2009-2014.

Even less expected was a **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**, back for its second winter at Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel. Unfortunately, it wasn’t found until after the 2023 event, but we did pick it up for 2024. There are only two previous Pasadena CBC records of this Neotropical flycatcher, one from 1992 and the other from 2005.

A **Plumbeous Vireo**, scarce but regular on the count,



California Gnatcatcher on CBC at the Whittier Narrows Dam

© Naresh Satyan

was at Garvey Ranch Park (Omar Alui). In addition, three **Loggerhead Shrikes** were detected: one at Santa Fe Dam (Alui) and two along the Rio Hondo (Satyan). Up through the 1980s, this species was relatively common, with 40-50 individuals recorded in some years. For reasons still unknown, their decline on the coastal slope has been precipitous, with recent counts averaging one to two individuals.

Two **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** at Peck Road Water Conservation Park (Darren Dowell) were the only ones of their clan found.

Six **California Gnatcatchers** were spotted in the greater Whittier Narrows area. This species is now restricted to a few remaining patches of coastal sage scrub, with birds occasionally wandering into adjacent habitat.

A count week **American Dipper** in Big Santa Anita Canyon was the first on the count since 2013 (Dowell). The extended drought hasn’t done any favors for this species, which is dependent on perennial streams.

A **Mountain Bluebird** was at Viña Vieja Park in Pasadena (Tiller, Hamilton, Deborah Tammearu), and two **Townsend’s Solitaires**, irregular on the count, were near Mt. Wilson (Benner).

Four **Vesper Sparrows** were found at Santa Fe Dam (Alui), this being the only reliable location for them in the count circle.

Two **Hooded Orioles** were at The Huntington, where we’ve come to expect one or two each winter (Sarah Ngo, Jon Fisher). This is the only location in the county where this species can be found with regularity in winter.

Wrapping things up was a count week **Black-and-white Warbler** at Peck Road Water Conservation Park (Dowell).

Jon Fisher has been coordinating the Christmas Bird Count since 1992. He compiles the Los Angeles Rare Bird Alert weekly and authors a column for the Los Angeles Audubon Society newsletter, the *Western Tanager*.

More CBC photos? Check the Social Birders column in the previous issue of *The Wrenit*, for photographer Sean Doorly’s images of participants in action and the dinner party at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center.

CBC 2024 in Numbers

17,380

Individual
Birds

Area covered 175 square miles

Notable misses Northern Pintail & Lesser Scaup

Participants over 60

154

Total
species

Rarifies Solitary Sandpiper,
Common Goldeneye,
and Tropical Kingbird

WEEDING WORKS

Volunteers Provide Habitat Support at Hahamongna By Helin Jung

Gardeners know that when it comes to weeds, the work is never done. But, occasionally, there is progress.

In the case of Pasadena Audubon Society's adopted site at Hahamongna Watershed Park, where volunteers led by Darren Dowell have been hacking away (literally) at invasive plants since October 2023, efforts to eradicate a stand of arundo, or giant reed (*Arundo donax*), have paid off.

The hillside was once covered with the stuff. Now, the slope has been repopulated with native plants such as California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and California everlasting (*Pseudognaphalium californicum*), as the preeminent area naturalist Mickey Long pointed out to the volunteers during a plant walk before a work day last May. More native plants means higher quality habitat for local wildlife.

A group of 14 volunteers returned to the site in December. Those who most resembled

mountain goats tackled lanceleaf nightshade (*Solanum lanceolatum*), a plant native to Central America. It has beautiful purple flowers that make it a popular ornamental, but it is seemingly indestructible and thorny to boot.

In addition to the nightshade, a tamarisk was cut down, and the group removed eight 30-gallon bags of the ever-pervasive shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*). With the help of the Pasadena parks staff, the mustard was taken away from the worksite for disposal.

There was so much of that weed that our youngest volunteers cooked up a business idea: Making a condiment using all that mustard. Not only are our volunteers industrious, they're entrepreneurial.

The work continues in 2025, with focus on the lanceleaf nightshade. There will be more mustard to wrestle with, of course, as well as castor bean and tree tobacco. If any of that excites you, please join us!

▶ ASK HELIN

Don't Pull, Record Weeds, Join a Group

I've lately grown interested in native plants, but now I'm seeing invasive plants everywhere I look and I hate it! Is there anything that I can do?

If I'm on a hike and I see castor bean, am I okay to pull it out of the ground?

As tempting as it is to yank invasives such as shortpod mustard from the side of the trail, it's best to leave those weeds alone.

For starters, it's illegal to remove plants without permission from land that you do not own. Beyond that, simply pulling a weed may not always be an effective strategy, depending on the plant's growth stage and how big the infestation is. It's also common for people to pull native plants mistaking them for non-natives; this often happens with wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpa*).

According to Gabi McLean, president of the California Native Plant Society's San Gabriel Mountains chapter, what individuals can do that would be helpful is record observations of non-native and invasive plants on iNaturalist. This allows land managers to track where and how species are presenting themselves.

Another thing you can do is join a volunteer group (PAS has one!) working on a conservation project. Organizations like CNPS often have recurring opportunities for invasive plant removal. That way, you can learn smart ways to weed and have an authorized outlet to pull those darn invasive plants!



© Helin Jung

Should you pull that weed?

Is it on Your Property?



Get rid of it!
 Make sure to dispose of seeds properly
 Look up best strategies for removal

Leave it alone
 Join a volunteer group
 Record the weeds



Weeds or not? Pictured left to right: Wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpa*) is native; shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) is ubiquitous and invasive; though beautiful, Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) is also invasive.



SALTON SEA BIRD FEST

Owls and Cranes from Sunrise to Sunset

Katarina Doorly, 11 years old

The sun had finally risen when we pulled into the parking lot of the Salton Sea State Recreation Area. We were there for their annual bird festival, last January.

People say the Salton Sea is barren, dry, desolate, and there is no life there. But the Salton Sea can be beautiful, diverse, and even magical if you know where to look.

We started the festival with the North-to-South Tour led by Luke Tiller, Justyn Stahl, and Catherine Hamilton. In the lake behind the visitor center, we saw Northern Shovelers, American Coots, a Marsh Wren, a Cinnamon Teal, and Bonaparte's Gulls. We also birded in the scrubby desert nearby and spotted Western Bluebirds, Phainopeplas, Cactus Wren, and Sage Thrashers, a trip highlight.



Burrowing Owls Both photos: © Katarina Doorly

Near the Fountain of Youth Desert Hot Springs, another memorable find: a Loggerhead Shrike. We had lunch at the Sonny Bono State National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, where we encountered friendly quails and doves at the feeders. On Young Road, we caught a Merlin catching a Sandpiper.

But the REAL best bird was when we were driving away. The cars in front of us were stopped, and as I looked out the window - I saw it. A Burrowing Owl perched on top of a haystack! I grabbed my camera and snapped a few shots.

We left the Burrowing Owl to go to.... a random field in the middle of nowhere. Luke said Mountain Plovers had been spotted there before and, low and behold, he was right!

As we moved to another area in search of Mountain Bluebirds, Luke called me to a field across the road. Some 10 feet in front of us, not at all phased by our presence, tucked away behind a mound of dirt, sat four Burrowing Owls! Two almost fledglings and two adults.

I took dozens of pictures and was literally shaking! Paulette Donnellon and her friends were the people we had to thank for finding these little guys.

Sadly, we had to leave them to look for Sandhill Cranes at Sonny Bono at sunset. In the flooded fields and wetlands, dozens of cranes flew overhead.

Their shrill calls filled the rapidly chilling air; their silhouettes filled the sky as the oranges and yellows of sunset turned into the pinks and purples of dusk. The calls of the cranes and the nearby snow geese turned into yips of coyotes in the rapidly approaching night.



The club welcomes young birders of all levels and meets on the first Wednesday of the month, from 5:30 to 6:30pm. Sign up at www.pasadenaudubon.org/youngbirders

IT'S SPRING Time to Support Our Nesting Wild Birds

by Dave Weeshoff

As spring arrives, many birds begin the crucial process of nesting and egg-laying. While most birds accumulate calcium in their bones throughout the year to ensure they have enough for eggshell formation, providing supplemental calcium can be beneficial.

The National Audubon Society suggests an easy way to offer extra calcium:

- Rinse broken eggshells in the sink.
- Spread them on a cookie sheet and bake at 250°F for about 10 minutes, ensuring they dry without browning.
- Crush the dried shells and mix them with birdseed or scatter them directly on the ground.

Also, you might hang a net bag containing natural cotton balls to provide fibrous material for nests. Pack the natural cotton in a coarse netting material, like that found in the produce section of the market, and hang it where birds can find and peck at it.

As always, provide fresh, clean water if you can. Moving water is even better for bird attraction and viewing.

For information on how to provide a variety of completely natural nesting materials, go to <https://tinyurl.com/AudubonNesting>



© Fernanda Ezabella

Nesting ball for the hummingbirds.



A female Costa's Hummingbird, prepping her nest near Palm Springs.

© Deborah Tammeau

► ASK DAVE

'Bird Flu' and Bird Feeders

Can I still provide food in my feeders for the wild birds I enjoy so much?

This is one of the most frequent questions I am asked as the Pasadena Audubon Society Conservation Chair.

A very recent and excellent article has been published by the Cornell Lab about it. I have paraphrased them below for brevity, and you can read the full text here: <https://tinyurl.com/CornellBirdFeeders>

While many species of wild birds have tested positive for avian flu, scientists have determined that there is a low risk to songbirds of getting the flu at feeders. Raptors and waterfowl are much more sensitive to the disease, but it is still infrequent.

Looking at the data referenced in the article, in all of 2024, only nine wild birds were reported as dying of the avian flu in all of Los Angeles County: five Canada Geese, three Western Gulls, and one Turkey Vulture.

If you keep nest boxes:

Cornell Lab writes: "Avian influenza is only

rarely transmitted to humans, according to the USDA. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the general public health risk from avian flu to be low. Nevertheless, our NestWatch project always advises good hygiene and highly recommends that people wear disposable gloves and/or wash their hands thoroughly after checking nest boxes. Most birds that use nest boxes are songbirds, which are at low risk for contracting or transmitting avian influenza."

I add that if you have the need to pick up a dead or severely distressed wild bird it is suggested you wear gloves, change or wash gloves, disinfect any equipment, and wear a KN95 mask.

There's more in the article, including advice for poultry owners and wildlife rehabilitators, what to do if you find a sick or dead bird, avian flu in mammals, and a list of detections in wild birds.

As usual, please contact me at Weeshoff@sbcglobal.net or 818-618-1652 with any questions, comments, or to participate in any of our conservation efforts.

FROM NEUROBIOLOGY TO BIRDING

Jieyu Zheng and the Magic of Birds

By Sean Doorly

Jieyu Zheng is a fifth-year PhD student in the Neurobiology program at the California Institute of Technology. Her research explores cognitive flexibility, learning, and memory. Before joining Caltech, she earned undergraduate degrees from Cornell University (B.S. in Biological Engineering) and Shanghai Jiao Tong University (B.Eng. in Food Science and Engineering), followed by an M.Phil. in Education and Psychology from the University of Cambridge.

Beyond her academic pursuits, Jieyu is an avid birder, artist, and wildlife photographer. Originally from Northern China, she now calls Pasadena home. I had the pleasure of meeting Jieyu on the beautiful Caltech campus to discuss her life, research, and deep passion for birds.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in the northern part of China, by the coast. There are birds there that are very specialized.

Did you get into birding when you were little?

There was no concept of birding. I really like birds, partially because I had pet birds.

When did you leave China?

At age 19, I transferred to Cornell for the second half of my undergrad. I studied bioengineering around that time. That was for a few years, and then I became more into birds.

So, after Cornell?

I moved to Cambridge in the UK and did a master's there. That's where I started birding because there are so many rivers and water bodies with ducks and swans. Starting from then, my phone was just loaded with bird photos. I bought my first camera, it cost maybe \$200 – a very cheap one. I began to get into photography. And I also did rowing there, and when we were rowing on the river, we passed by birds very closely – they would watch you. So that's magical.



When did you get involved in birding with the Pasadena Audubon Society?

That was about a year and a half ago because I didn't have a car for my first several years living in California. Birding is a very important part of my life.

What do you love about PAS?

It helps you enter the mode of being embraced by nature, and that you are with a group of people who are equally interested in birds. You get to learn a lot from each other because they're really good experts. And for me, it's also a nice step outside campus because everyone else here will be talking about science.



Mute Swan cygnets in Cambridge, U.K.

What was your spark bird?

Oh, that's a good one. I get asked a lot by my friends – what's your favorite bird? But when you have been in this field long enough, I feel like maybe everything is a spark. But I would say Mute Swan. I follow them so closely. I tend to have lots and lots of photos of them.

What's your most memorable birding experience?

Maybe the pelagic. Because that one is a full day of birding, that was my first time ever going on a boat for that long period of time. And I didn't know you could feed them popcorn [laughs]. There are so many moments when you can't see anything but the ocean, and then you see these birds that are so small and tiny.

Do you have some tips for people who are new to birding?

I think wanting is the most difficult part, because a lot of my friends are like, what is cool about it? I try to drag them into it, but the second difficult step is to wake up at seven on the weekend. I'm not gonna do that on the weekend. It's for sleeping in. A tip for new birders is to ask a lot of questions. The trip leaders in Pasadena Audubon are very knowledgeable. And they make it fun and interesting.

Anything else to add?

Before, I didn't bird with binoculars. The swans were close enough to me, and I could identify them. And I also had bird feeders. But when you have binoculars, you can see the little secret life of birds.

You can follow Jieyu on Instagram at [Instagram.com/birb.lavr](https://www.instagram.com/birb.lavr)

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House Finch Munching on Cherry Blossoms. © Lynzie Flynn

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