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# WESTERN TANAGER

*Ballona Salt Panne Habitat | Photo by Jonathan Coffin*



Los Angeles Audubon Society  
 P.O. Box 411301  
 Los Angeles, CA 90041-8301  
[www.losangelesaudubon.org](http://www.losangelesaudubon.org)  
 (323) 876-0202  
[LAAS@laaudubon.org](mailto:LAAS@laaudubon.org)

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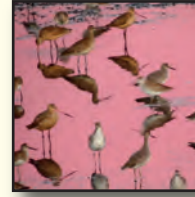
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**Editor** Linda Oberholtzer [editorwtanager@gmail.com](mailto:editorwtanager@gmail.com)  
**Design & Layout** Susan Castor [susancastor@laaudubon.org](mailto:susancastor@laaudubon.org)  
**Scientific Advisor** Kimball Garrett [kgarrett@nhm.org](mailto:kgarrett@nhm.org)

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## ON THE COVER

*Ballona Salt Panne Habitat | Photo by Jonathan Coffin*



*Jonathan Coffin is a naturalist and photographer of exceptional talent. He has dedicated decades to photographing the biodiversity of the Ballona Wetlands and verifying his discoveries with other scientists. He can be found day or night documenting the wildlife (plants and animals) from the edges of the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve.*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

INCONSISTENCIES AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES...  
 By Margot Griswold

INTERPRETING NATURE  
 SUMMER FELLOWS: MOVING FORWARD,  
 WORKING WITH NATURE  
 By Arely Mendia Perez

HUNTINGTON BEACH OIL SPILL – PIPELINE BREACH  
 OF OCTOBER 2, 2021  
 By Cindy Hardin

OSO FLACO LAKE  
 By Carol Babeli

BIRDS OF THE SEASON – OCTOBER 2021  
 By Jon Fisher

ISLAND HOPPING: BIRDING THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS  
 PART 2: ST. JOHN — AN ISLAND PARK  
 By Robbie Lisa Freeman

### ALSO ON THE CALENDAR

MONTHLY PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS  
 (Online) | Wed., Nov. 10th and Wed., Dec. 8th.  
 See Pg. 24.

BIRD WALKS are back! See Pg. 25

MEMORIAL GATHERING Nov. 13th for Eleanor  
 Osgood, Irwin Woldman, and Don White. See  
 Pg. 26.

# INCONSISTENCIES AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CURRENT CDFW PLAN FOR THE BALLONA WETLANDS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE

By Margot Griswold, Ph.D, Photos by Jonathan Coffin



I want to acknowledge that the land which encompasses the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (BWER) is part of the unceded territory of the Tongva/Gabrielino people. The Tongva call this land *Pwinukipar* ('it is filled with water').

And indeed, the historic wetlands of over 2,000 acres were filled seasonally with freshwater from the Ballona Creek watershed, especially in years of heavy rainfall (Dark et al. 2010). Historically, the Ballona Wetlands were only open to tidal influence from the Pacific Ocean in years of heavy rainfall when the double dune system at the beach was breached from the flood waters. And importantly, there is no record of cord grass (*Spartina foliosa*) within the Ballona Wetlands which is a plant species that is usually found in tidal wetlands. Areas of brackish water near the Pacific Ocean at the westerly end of the historic wetlands supported salt marsh vegetation. Based on the shape of the land and movement of sand, the opening to the Pacific Ocean was closed relatively quickly (Jacobs et al. 2011). Such sand movement can be seen at estuaries in Orange and San Diego Counties where openings have been engineered to create full tidal wetlands. These estuaries must be constantly dredged to keep the estuaries open to the ocean.

All of this history matters, because the current plans for the Ballona Wetlands under the management of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife run counter to this historical ecology. Ballona Wetlands is of central importance to Los Angeles Audubon as a birding location and the site of our long-standing and highly successful elementary school education program. We have trained hundreds of docents and educated thousands of schoolchildren about this land and its natural functioning. In this column, I review the plans for this important place, how they conflict with its ecology and are infeasible in the face of sea level rise, and a possible path forward.

Most of the remaining Ballona Wetlands were designated as a State Ecological Reserve in 2005. The Reserve is the largest remaining coastal wetland in Los Angeles. It is sandwiched generally between Marina del Rey to the north, Playa Vista to the east, bluffs to the south, and a double dune system to the west, separating it from the



Pacific Ocean. The BWER is bisected by the Ballona Flood Control Channel, which carries rainwater and dry season urban flow from the upper Ballona Creek Watershed through the urban core to the ocean. BWER is owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), which is the land manager.

The language of the official State designation of the BWER is helpful to understand some of the issues surrounding the ongoing effort to rehabilitate the wetlands. The language in the California Code of Regulations for the designation of the Ballona Wetlands as an Ecological Reserve is revealing:

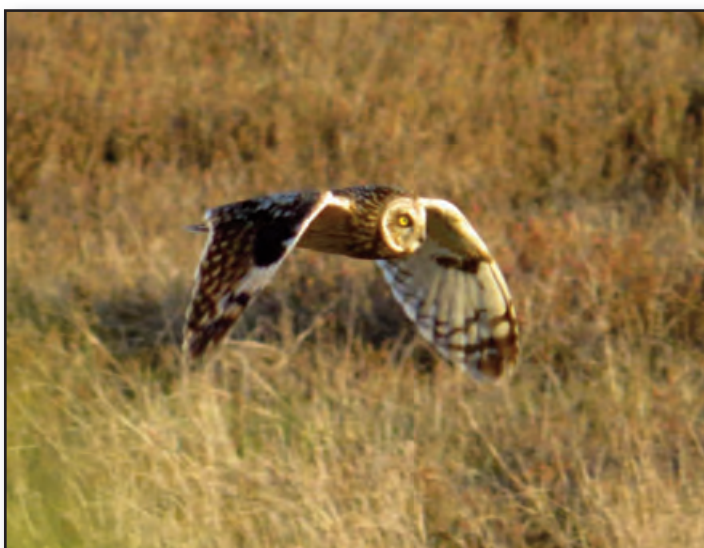
**“Ballona Wetlands consisting of 553 acres in Los Angeles County is proposed for designation as an ecological reserve for the protection and enhancement of coastal salt marsh and freshwater marsh habitats, and associated species, including the state listed endangered Belding’s savannah sparrow. The area is also an important wildlife movement corridor to other public lands in the vicinity of the wetlands.**

**The reasons for listing this property in Title 14 are to regulate public use and provide the best available protection for the species and habitats the property was acquired to protect.”** *Section 630, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, relating to Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, 2005.*

State law requires that an Ecological Reserve have Land Management Plan prepared by CDFW (Fish and Game Code Section 1019). As of this writing, no Land Management Plan for BWER has been prepared.

So BWER has gone 16 years without a Land Management Plan, and it shows. Most importantly, a Land Management Plan would set goals, which in this case, would be those already articulated in its designation, “the protection of salt marsh and freshwater marsh habitats and the associated species ...” The plan would describe the natural resources of a site and usually would develop detailed maps and analyses of soils, common and rare vegetation communities, year-round and migratory wildlife, and in the case of a wetland, detailed hydrologic information, including surface water and groundwater resources. The results of these studies would be combined with historic and current conditions to determine how the resources within the site can be managed within a local and regional context. Generally, the trajectory of a site can be determined in the context of stressors, including, in the case of BWER, urban development and groundwater pumping, public access, climate change and sea level rise. From the detailed information gathered, an LMP outlines the management methods and timing to achieve the goals outlined. An outcome of a LMP may be a recommendation to develop a habitat restoration plan.

At Ballona, CDFW has approached the management process backwards. Instead of preparing a Land Management Plan, they skipped ahead to a ‘restoration plan’, planning for which was relatively closed to the public, in that there was no meaningful consideration of the public’s comments on the process or the plan. The ‘restoration’ plan that was developed for BWER, as presented in the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) ignores the language in the designation of the Ecological Reserve and the resources that it commits to protect.



Short Eared Owl over Ballona | Photo by Jonathan Coffin



White-tailed Kite at Ballona | Photo by Jonathan Coffin

The proposed 'restoration' plan is not by any definition a 'restoration', but rather it is a 'creation' plan that requires removing 3.2 million cubic yards of soil. This soil removal would open the wetlands to daily ocean tides of Santa Monica Bay, thereby laying the wetlands open to sea level rise and the loss of the habitat and the very species that the Ecological Reserve designation is meant to protect. But you do not have to take my word for it.

The impacts from sea level rise are shown in the Final EIR (ESA 2020, Figures 2-36 through 2-40) and plainly show the loss of habitats that are exceedingly rare in Southern California coastal wetlands (as I described in *Western Tanager*, 2020 Volume 87 No. 2 Nov-Dec):

- Salt panne/salt flat habitat, beloved by migrating birds, will be lost in the first 10 years of the proposed project, 2030.
- Mid-marsh habitat and high marsh (mainly *Salicornia virginica* as well as *Juamea carnososa* and *Distichlis spicata*) will start to disappear in 2030 and by 2100 will be such a narrow band, that experts indicate it will not be viable breeding habitat for the State-listed Endangered Belding's Savannah Sparrow.
- Loss of low, mid and high marsh will start in 2030 and by 2100 result in the loss of most, if not all, existing species using this habitat either as breeding or foraging, including the White-tailed Kite, a State Fully-Protected Species, among other wildlife species, namely small mammals that feed the many other raptors, as well as snakes and coyotes.

These impacts show that the current plan for BWER completely ignores the designation of the Ballona Wetlands as an Ecological Reserve, and its purpose to protect and

enhance "coastal salt marsh and freshwater marsh habitats, and associated species, including the state listed endangered Belding's savannah sparrow" (14 CCR 630).

Impacts to these species and habitats from sea level rise would be far less without the project (see Appendix B7, Figures 6–10, of the FEIR, ESA 2020). With proper management of BWER, there would likely be negligible impacts from sea level rise with the 'No Project' alternative as compared to the proposed project.

If the proposed project is not based on the purpose of the 2005 designation of the wetlands as an Ecological Reserve, nor on a specific Land Management Plan, what is the basis for the proposed 'restoration' project? To be implemented, the Ballona Wetlands would have to be officially re-designated from a non-marine ecological reserve (14 CCR 630) to a marine ecological reserve (14 CCR 632). The analysis of sea level rise alone shows that there will be nothing but open water, mud flats and engineered flood control levees by 2100 under that scenario.

Opposition to the proposed plan for BWER is much more than a disagreement over saltwater versus freshwater. The fact is that a reasonable alternative to enhance and rehabilitate the existing habitats and consider the wetland's trajectory as a mainly seasonal freshwater/brackish water wetlands for over the last 150 years, was rejected without adequate analysis because it would 'require management' (per CDFW Director C. Bonham, 10/14/21, Fish & Game Commission meeting). All land requires some management, and without a more detailed analysis of predominately seasonal freshwater marsh alternative presented for full public review, CDFW's reasoning is questionable, and its environmental analysis is lacking.



*Belding's Savannah Sparrow on Pickleweed Habitat at Ballona Wetlands*



*Female Northern Harrier at Ballona Pickleweed Marsh Habitat*



# CURRENT PLANS WILL NOT PROTECT EXISTING MARSH SPECIES FROM EXPECTED SEA LEVEL RISE

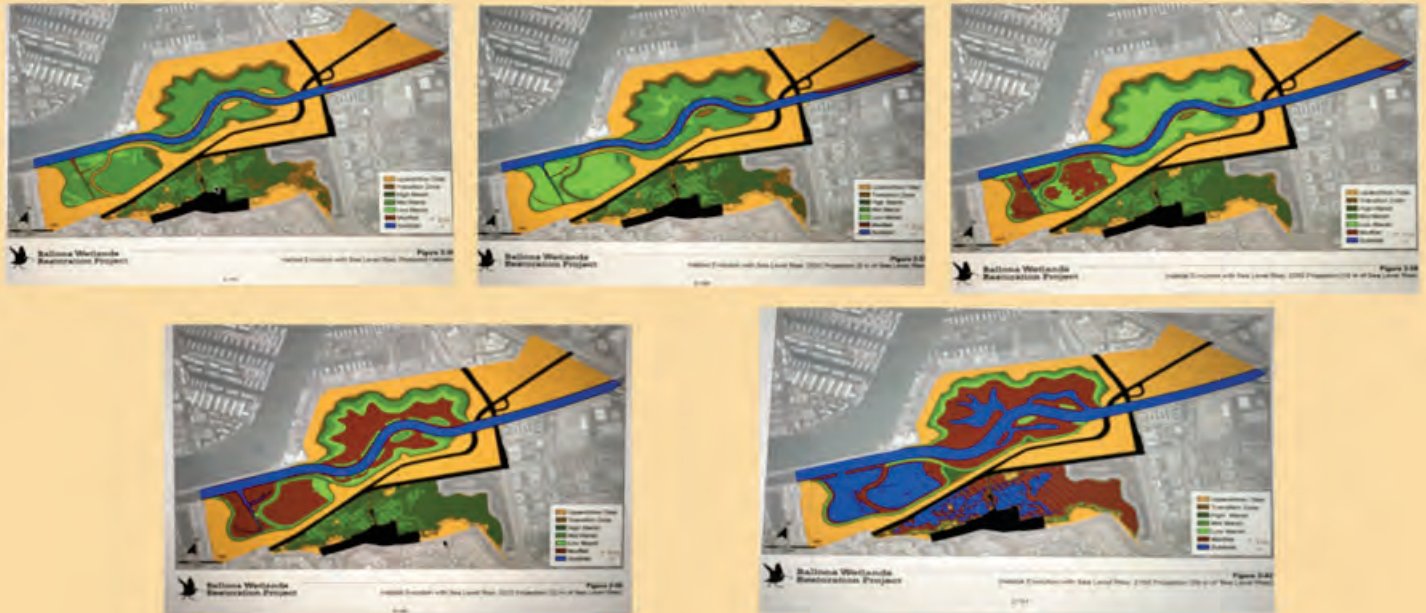


Figure 1. Loss of marsh habitat from sea level rise with the current CDFW plan – Map colors: greens are low, mid, and high marsh; red is mudflat; blue is open water.

Furthermore, the current proposed plan results in outcomes that are inconsistent with Governor Newsom’s goals for the State.

The proposed plan will:

- Make the wetlands less resilient to sea-level rise, losing existing rare coastal habitats almost from the outset. It is the only project on the Pacific coast that proposes to lower a coastal wetland and open it to full tidal influence and existing sea level, to protect the wetland from future sea level rise.
- There will be a loss of existing species diversity both in terms of the soil ecosystem and the above the ground ecosystem, from the start of the project, including the loss of increasingly rare regional coastal wetland habitats.
- The removal of 3.2 million cubic yards of soil will result in the loss of carbon currently sequestered in the soil (which was not considered in the Final EIR) as well as loss through the massive operations to move that much soil which is acknowledged as an impact in the Final EIR. It is unlikely that the project, as described, can replace the carbon loss through sequestration.

How could such an approach have been developed by a resource protection agency?


It seems that the main motivation for the massive removal of soil, below the historic marsh surface is based on an idea that fill was placed on Area A of the wetlands in the 1960s. The claims that Area A of the BWER received fill from the material dredged from the creation of Marina Del Rey in the early 1960s, however, are not born out by historical records, which describe the use of the dredge material from the marina to significantly enhance beaches north and south of Marina Del Rey, as well as to build up areas of Marina Del Rey itself, because it was built on a wetland and needed soil! This information is found in U.S. House of Representatives Document 389 from 1954, 83rd Congress. Other compelling records include reports from a wetland assessment for the US EPA (Huffman 1986) and the Phase I Playa Vista Archeology Report (1994) that indicate no surface disturbance of soil on Area A except along the Ballona Flood Control Channel where soil was disposed from building the levees. Nor do historical photos support the claims. The claims of fill in Area A are much repeated, but I have never seen documentation for the fill.

The elevation of Area A is 14-feet above sea level, which leads some people to think it was filled. However, as documented by Dr. David Jacobs of UCLA, coastal wetlands behind dune systems, such as at Ballona, are often the result of freshwater perched at elevations above sea level (URSUS 2021).

The facts remain that the areas of the Ballona Wetlands were designated as a State Ecological Reserve with specific language as to the protection of coastal salt marsh and freshwater marsh habitats and the species associated with these habitats. No Land Management Plan has been prepared for BWER since it was designated in 2005, even though some 15 million dollars have been spent through the California Coastal Conservancy to prepare a 'restoration' plan that is neither a 'restoration' nor a plan that protects the resources designated in California code to be protected at Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve.

Current science must be considered to base management decisions for BWER, and consensus must be reached to find the most ecologically efficient plan to increase the functional integrity of the existing wetlands and maintain the public trust.

Let's discuss openly the science and the opportunities for management to truly restore, enhance and rehabilitate BWER. We suggest an open forum, led by an unbiased, trained facilitator. There is science to be discussed and consensus to be reached. Otherwise, the beat will continue with loss of public access and habitat through lack of management of BWER.

True public input and consensus has been missing from the process. It can be done with some planning and open discussion. We look forward to participating in the process of developing the missing Land Management Plan for BWER, as a starting point. 

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*Margot Griswold, Ph.D., is a restoration ecologist with over 27 years of experience in habitat restoration. Soils, landscape position, and hydrology, coupled with existing and historic vegetation guide her work in restoration. She participated in consensus planning for plant and wildlife habitat within the Habitat Work Group of the Owens Lake Dust Control Project, Inyo County, California. She is past president of the Society for Ecological Restoration California and the Los Angeles Audubon Society.*

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# ISLAND HOPPING: BIRDING THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

## PART 2: ST. JOHN — AN ISLAND PARK

By Robbie Lisa Freeman

*This is the second in a series of three articles on birding in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I headed there recently to learn about the birds on St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas, and the ecosystems that nurture them.*

IT'S ONLY 8 A.M. AT FRANCIS BAY IN ST. JOHN, USVI, BUT A SMALL bead of sweat is already doing a slow roll down my right temple as I fire off shots of the Crested Anole. My subject is performing an impressive display of territorial dominance. It stands statuesque, inflating a large and spectacular rainbow-colored chin. Add to that a sudden and repetitive up and down motion, as if it's doing pushups, and you know this is a creature to be reckoned with....

But enough! Though the fellow has put on a mesmerizing exhibition, this leathery little guy is a lizard! He is not the Northern Parula I have come so far to photograph.

We'd arrived at sunrise, hoping to catch the elusive parula breakfasting on insects. But now, three hours into our stakeout, I'm concerned our warbler has flown the coop. Truth is, we'd been told there was little chance to see this lifer. These tiny yellow and blue-grey warblers were typically long gone from the island by mid-April, winging their way to breeding grounds as far north as the boreal forests of Canada or any forest in between that hosts trees draped in Spanish moss or lichen, used for nesting. Yet, we had good reason to be hopeful. The previous day, on a tip from a local birder, we had driven to Francis Bay in search of the parula. After scouring the treetops along the 0.7-mile boardwalk surrounding the salt pond, we had come to the end of the trail – literally. The boardwalk had ended beachfront, where we'd taken advantage of a well-placed picnic table to sit in the shade and ruminate over missing the bird. But while chatting, we'd heard chip-chipping sounds of a bird on the prowl. Then my husband, Randy, had seen a flash of feathers in the tree across from us.

"There's something there," he'd said, pointing to the middle of the tree. Binoculars up, we'd combed the branches.

"That's not something," I'd exclaimed. "That's the Northern Parula!" In my excitement, I'd fumbled the camera, not stopping to check my ISO or other settings. The bird had darted in and out of the shadows, mocking my attempts to capture him. And though he'd definitely made our day – yippee, another lifer – we hadn't captured a single good shot. Thus, our second stakeout.

As the sun climbs higher, I feel hope fading. I kick at the sand, silently kicking myself too. Photography lessons are definitely on order.

"Shall we call it?" Randy asks.

"A few more minutes," I respond for perhaps the 10th time. He is patient. A good quality in a birder. I continue to search the tree. This bird will come to this tree, I steadfastly affirm.

Northern Parulas typically flit and hop primarily through the upper levels of the forest and subcanopy, but during migration to islands like St. John, they'll forage lower in the understory, darting around the tips of branches plucking off tasty insects. Lucky for us, this tree is small, and the bird we had seen before stayed just above eye level.

More minutes tick by, and I'm ready to give up. Then, in the distance, I hear him calling. We hold our breaths as we suddenly see the bird streak through the air down to our tree. He lurks in the interior, hiding behind leaves and branches, gathering breakfast. He flashes his gorgeous yellow and blue-grey feathers at us over and over. We're both shooting, but the little devil is always behind a leaf or branch. It's like he's playing cat and mouse with us! My camera is getting heavier by the moment as I try to follow the bird. Why can't he just... sit... still...! I finally bring the camera down, frustrated by the folly. But then, I catch him creeping toward the top of a branch and voilà – he's in view! I rattle off a dozen shots and then he's gone. We grin. The little guy made our morning.



*The elusive Northern Parula typically migrates through the Virgin Islands between November to April before heading north for the forests of Canada and the U.S. mainland. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman.*



And now, we're off to find more lifers on this island paradise.

St. John straddles the Caribbean Sea on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Of the three major U.S. Virgin Islands, St. John is unique because more than half of it is protected national parkland. Landlubbers can revel in the island's 7,000+ acres of hiking trails, beaches, and tropical forests. Salty dogs can swim, snorkel, or dive amid aquatic treasures in Coral Reef National Monument, an 18,000-acre underwater preserve that boasts brain corals, sea stars, and tropical fish. And birders like me can enjoy chasing the 150-plus species of migrating and resident birds, ranging from American Redstarts to Bridled Quail Doves and Mangrove Cuckoos.

As we explore the island's 19.6 square miles, I'm eager to spy lifer number 2 — the Smooth-billed Ani. This jet-black member of the cuckoo family may not be striking in plumage, but he has his own charms, including a Jimmy Durante-styled beak that's almost bigger than his face. Driving along Centerline Road, through the higher elevations of the island, I keep my eyes to the tree line while Randy pilots our unassuming Yaris rental car. Ahead in the trees I see a flock of black birds and yell "Pull over!" I leap out of the barely stopped Yaris with camera in hand and move slowly along the roadside toward the trees. But the flock is wary. Before I can get close enough to click off some shots, the "black witch" of St. John has streaked away, leaving me in a wake of squeaky "ahh-nee" whistling caws. Over the next few days, the mercurial anis would tease us with glimpses, but would never let us get within photo range.



*Smooth-billed Anis live in small groups and work together as a tight-knit community. While the group forages, one member often sits on a high perch, keeping a lookout for danger. Females even lay their eggs all in one communal nest, sharing the incubation and caretaking of nestlings. Photo courtesy of Gail Karlsson.*

But exploring the island has other rewards. From the underwater snorkel trail in Trunk Bay to the coral reefs off Watermelon Bay, to the petroglyphs and sugar mill ruins off Reef Bay Trail, there is plenty to see and do. The sea views alone are entrancing. In Coral Bay, we finally concede that it's time for food and begin searching for a restaurant. But instead, near a roadside warehouse, I spot what appears to be a colorful Cattle Egret. We had tried to shoot Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage while visiting St. Croix. Dozens had been huddled in a rookery — but were 100 yards away, and across a body of water. Too far for good photos. But here, with this bird so close, we have a chance.

"Turn around," I sputter. My husband looks at me with typical mystification. "Cattle egrets!" I exclaim, pointing behind us. He executes a U-turn with the precision of someone who's done this a few times.

"There! There!" I command, pointing to a dirt lot across the street from where I'd seen the egret. He parks as directed and we both climb out to search for the bird. He's near a low shrub -- an odd spot for this bird. Cattle Egrets are typically found foraging in fields near cattle or other livestock. We creep over, not wanting to spook him. He's not alone. Two other egrets are nearby. As we move closer, he flies to the roof of a garage. High above us he settles and practically poses. In breeding plumage, a Cattle Egret is a handsome sight. The head, chest, and back turn an impressive golden orange. Appreciatively, we snap off a few photos and bid him goodbye.



*In Coral Bay, we stumbled upon three Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage. Originally found only in Africa, they were ubiquitous in the company of rhinos, ostriches, and elephants. By 1941, Cattle Egrets had made their way to North America, where they've since flourished. Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*The mission of the Virgin Islands National Park is to protect the natural resources of the island so future generations can enjoy them. In 1976, the park was designated as an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), becoming one of the first protected areas in the world to receive this designation. | Photo courtesy of Laurel Brannick.*

### **Small Island, Big Challenges**

It's a short walk from the Virgin Islands National Park headquarters in Cruz Bay to The Small Pond at Frank Bay Wildlife & Marine Sanctuary. Park Ranger Laurel Brannick and local writer and environmental lawyer Gail Karlsson are spending time with us today, showing us local birds and their habitats. Brannick has been with the park service since 1992, after moving to the island to work as a life guard.

"I came here to vacation, but I moved here for the water and weather," she says. "As a scuba diver, swim instructor, and lifeguard, I felt I'd found the perfect place." Three years later she became a park ranger, where she met many people who mentored her.

"I learned about birds from two ladies in their 70s, Thelma and Bea, who were called the 'bird ladies,'" says Brannick. "They'd been park volunteers leading bird walks for 14 years. They'd invite me over for cornbread and tea and tell me their secrets about how to listen for and identify birds by song and calls. They taught me about the various habitats that attract certain birds to come back to the same areas year after year. When they retired from volunteering, they encouraged me to take over the bird walks, and birding became my favorite thing to do."

Brannick soon became involved in the local Audubon and was the president of the chapter for about a decade. Between her ranger job and Audubon work, she has helped to introduce local birds to many tourists, as well as many of St. John's local kids. "The park offers kids an opportunity to learn about the wildlife, birds, plants, and island history

through programs like SKIP (School Kids in the Park)," says Brannick. "SKIP funds organized outings into the park, and buys binoculars for students to use on field trips. If you want people to appreciate nature, they have to see it."

Brannick also has helped champion environmental causes to save key natural resources like The Small Pond. The Small Pond is a postage stamp of a pond half a mile southwest of Cruz Bay's ferry dock. At first glance the brackish water may not seem like much, but it's quite special in many ways: It's located near town, bringing biodiversity close in for residents to experience; and it's one of only a handful of salt ponds on



*The White-cheeked Pintail, the only native duck in the Virgin Islands, is one of the many birds that have made the Small Pond at Frank Bay their home. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*The White-winged Dove breeds on some Caribbean Islands, as well as in Mexico, Central and South America, and the U.S.. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



St. John. Salt ponds are one of the most important ecosystems in nature, reducing coastal erosion, filtering pollutants from the water, and nurturing important plants and trees, including mangroves, that serve as rich habitat for marine life and birds. Yet it was not that long ago that Cruz Bay was fighting to preserve The Small Pond.

“Salt ponds aren’t beautiful like typical freshwater ponds, so many people don’t understand that they serve a vital role,” says Brannick. “Because The Small Pond was technically outside of the park conservation zone, in 1999 an adjacent property owner decided to develop over the pond. They were crushing the vegetation. They were even shooting the birds!”

Brannick was president of the local Audubon at the time, so she rallied the bird ladies and others to save the pond.

“The bird ladies would stand at the ferry dock every morning to wait for the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife, who commuted each day by Ferry from St. Thomas to St. John,” Brannick says. “They would greet her with questions: What are you going to do about the pond? When are you going to help us? They were the squeaky wheel. We also recruited a wildlife biologist and birder on St. Thomas who helped us make a scientific case for saving the pond. It took a constant effort of pushing, but we succeeded.”

In March 2000, The Small Pond was dedicated as an official bird sanctuary. Since then, the Audubon club and other organizations have continued to improve it, building an observation pier and installing nesting and resting platforms to protect the birds from predatory cats and dog. Today at the pond, we see the results of that work. Egrets and herons preen on their perches. White-cheeked Pintails and Common Gallinules glide over the smooth pond surface. Black-necked Stilts stand transfixed, hunting for breakfast. All are happily ensconced in the habitat that nurtures them.

The salt ponds are just one of a variety of important island habitats for birds. St. John has moist and dry subtropical forests, grasslands, island cays, and beaches. These habitats serve as stopping off points for hundreds of summer and winter migrants. Neotropical warblers, Bananaquits, and Bridled Quail Doves can be found in the forest trees and along trails. Herons and egrets can be seen by salt ponds and shores. And by boat, birders can spot boobies, terns, White-tailed Tropicbirds, and Magnificent Frigatebirds. We do our best to hit all the key birding spots: Francis Bay, Reef Bay, Lameshur, Leinster Bay, Brown Bay, and even Brannick’s back yard. At her home, she and Karlsson help us spy Black-faced Grassquits — another lifer for us! And even our hosts are impressed when a Caribbean Elaenia stops by for a visit.

“You never know what you’ll see,” says Brannick with a smile. “Every day is a new adventure on St. John.”

For information about guided tours and other events offered by the Virgin Islands National Park, visit: <https://www.nps.gov/viis/planyourvisit/rangerguidedtours.htm>.



*The Caribbean Elaenia is a species of the tyrant (Tyrannidae) family of passerines. The tyrant flycatchers are considered the largest family of birds known to exist in the world, with more than 400 species. The Caribbean Elaenia is found primarily in tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf or moist lowland forests in the Caribbean, French Caribbean and other island nations. | Photo Courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*Grassquits typically forage low to the ground in shrubs or grassy forest edges. The brownish-olive females, as depicted above, are easily distinguished from the olive-backed males. | Photo courtesy of Gail Karlsson.*



## A St. John 'Darwin Project'

Environmental attorney and author Gail Karlsson has been a part-time resident of St. John since 1991. In 2003, she was thrilled to purchase property near the water in Fish Bay, which turned out to include a black mangrove pond and wetlands area. As she explored her lot and the nearby conservation land, she began to document the rich ecosystem of the wetlands. She also started sharing photos and information about the many birds, lizards, crabs, insects, plants, and trees she saw there, publishing articles in the local newspapers and on her website [www.fishbaywetlands.com/](http://www.fishbaywetlands.com/).

"I started thinking about doing a nature survey in 2004, when I heard about a 'Darwin project' on Anegada in the British Virgin Islands," Karlsson told me. With funding from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative program, local islanders were working with scientists to map the unique plants, animals, fish, birds, and sea turtles at Anegada, providing data to help protect the ecosystem and promote survival of these species. Anegada has a coral reef system and plants of worldwide importance, as well as significant nesting and foraging areas for endangered marine turtles, iguanas, and birds. The UK program referenced Charles Darwin's famous studies of birds and other creatures in the remote Galapagos Islands. Darwin had noticed slight differences between members of the same species on different islands. His conclusion — that those differences made them more perfectly adapted to their specific environments — was critical in the development of his theory of evolution.

"Fish Bay isn't nearly as remote and exotic as the Galapagos, or Anegada," Karlsson admitted, "but it is a well-defined conservation area with a number of distinct habitats that deserve more investigation. There have been scientific studies of the coral along the outer edge of Fish Bay, the sharks breeding in the shallows, and the crayfish that live in the pools in the Fish Bay Gut. But there has been little formal documentation of the wonderful diversity of trees, plants, birds, insects, and other creatures here."

Karlsson believes that "our lives are enriched by understanding more about the environment around us, and as a result we become increasingly motivated to protect it."

For visitors like me, who marvel at the the diversity of nature on St. John, I completely concur. 

*Robbie Lisa Freeman is a public relations professional in Los Angeles and a contributing writer for the Western Tanager. Follow her on Instagram @freebird2020lf.*



*Park Ranger Laurel Brannick of the Virgin Islands National Park (l.) and Gail Karlsson, an environmental lawyer and a nature columnist for the Virgin Islands Source newspaper, share birding tips with writer Robbie Lisa Freeman. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*Local author and photographer Gail Karlsson spends much of her time on St. John documenting the flora and fauna of the Fish Bay area. She has published two books: "The Wild Life in an Island House" and "Learning about Plants and Trees on St. John." Follow her at [gvkarlsson.blogspot.com](http://gvkarlsson.blogspot.com), or on Instagram @gailkarlsson. | Photo courtesy of Gail Karlsson.*

# HUNTINGTON BEACH OIL SPILL — PIPELINE BREACH

OCTOBER 2, 2021

By Cindy Hardin



*A bird balances on a boom that was set up to contain oil in Huntington Beach. | Mario Tama/Getty Images*

Recently, my hometown of Huntington Beach has been much in the news, and not for a happy reason. For the past 10 days, the media has been saturated with coverage of an oil spill that originated there on October 2nd, 2021. Between 125,000 and 144,000 gallons (the exact estimated number varies) spewed from a ruptured pipeline, and as I write this the oil slick continues a relentless path southward. Currently, oil from the spill has been sighted as far south as Carlsbad, in San Diego County. Hopefully by the time you read this article the disaster will no longer be front page news, as that would mean clean-up has been completed. Sadly, “completed” only means that visible oil has been gathered and hauled away from the waters and beaches. It is an inevitable fact that some oil will remain entwined with the delicate and unique ecosystems along our coast, and it is quite possible the magnitude of the damage will never be properly inventoried.

During this period I have received calls from concerned friends all over the country who know that Huntington will always hold a special place in my heart.

The fact that Huntington Beach was pretty much founded and prospered via the oil industry is an irony that is not lost on me! There has also been much finger pointing around this event. Oil companies large and small have come under fire. Government regulations and oversight, or the lack thereof, have also been criticized. There is an outcry for the decommissioning of all offshore wells, and hand wringing about who is responsible and will handle the cost of this expensive process.

However, there is a saying that goes like this: When one points the finger, three point back at you. Our country and its residents have an insatiable appetite for petroleum. Although a higher percentage of vehicles on the road are hybrid or completely battery powered than a few years ago, gasoline guzzling trucks and SUVs are still the number one style of vehicles sold in America. Jet travel continues to cost less and less if inflation is taken into account, and number of flights, both domestic and international, are almost back to pre-pandemic levels. Fuel consumption by vehicles is an obvious use of petroleum, and I certainly am part of



this system. Although I ride my bike to work at least a couple of days a week, and pedal instead of drive for local errands, I still use my car regularly, and have a deep love of travel. But the presence of petroleum in our lives goes far beyond transportation.

Since the international health crisis reached our shores in March, 2020, online shopping has increased dramatically, and most of those goods come from overseas. Container ship traffic at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles has increased fivefold. In fact, the current theory is that the anchor of one of these massive vessels dragged the pipeline that ruptured over 100 feet, and the pressure on the pipe from this displacement weakened and eventually caused the pipe to crack, resulting in the spill of October 2nd. Transporting these items from abroad uses a huge amount of fossil fuel. Many, if not all of these products that we buy online are wrapped in plastic or surrounded by plastic packing material. And the items themselves are often made of plastic.

Another consequence of the pandemic has been a huge uptick in delivered and to go food. Plastic containers are heavily used to contain these foodstuffs. When we think of oil extraction, we mostly think of the fuel that oil is used to produce. But 40% of petroleum stock is used to make plastic. Many of our clothes and shoes are made of plastic, too. And in the United States alone, the plastic bottles that contain

the water and other beverages that we consume annually, if laid end to end, would reach to the moon and back 38 times. To make matters worse, only about 10% of those bottles are actually recycled.

Clearly, the uncomfortable truth is the finger points at all of us, at great profit to worldwide manufacturing companies and producers of fossil fuels. These entities are only responding to our demands. So the questions arise: What exactly is enough? What is the difference between need and want? Do we really “need” a new car every two or three years? Is it actually necessary to “refresh” our wardrobe, home furnishings, electronics and other household items before they have actually worn out? Slick advertisements tell us that we do, and we are more and more exposed to these sales pitches via social media, ubiquitous billboards, and even through product placement in the entertainment that we watch.

The good news is that as consumers, we do have choices. We can shop less, and avoid packaged food stuffs by eating more food that is not processed—think fresh produce. We can choose to use alternative transportation, like bicycles or our own two feet for local errands. Second hand stores abound in this part of the world, filled with lightly used items that can replace things that actually have worn out. These are all small steps, but collectively they can make a big difference.



Golden West Street, Back-in-the Day



If you have made it this far in reading this rather discouraging article, I commend your fortitude and hope that it might inspire some change in our collective habits. And I will close with a bit more good news: the Bolsa Chica Wetlands, a significant Ecological Reserve in Huntington Beach, seems to have escaped contamination from this oil spill. This is great news for resident wildlife and the migratory birds that are now returning to these wetlands for their annual winter stay. Unfortunately, a smaller wetland to the south, Talbert Marsh, did see oil wash in amongst its mudflats and waters, but diligent clean-up efforts were

made at this location. And the majority of the slick stayed further out to sea, and did not seem to sully the rocky intertidal zones of Laguna, a Marine Protected Area.

This spill could have been much worse that it actually was, and was nowhere near as large as the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, one of the first events to bring home the environmental dangers of offshore drilling. It is my hope that it will be taken as a warning, and an impetus for change.



# A VISIT TO OSO FLACO LAKE

By Carol Babeli

Photos by the author



*Oso Flaco — Ocean View*

**O**SO FLACO LAKE IS SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge and the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area.

This unique coastal area is currently under contentious review, pitting fans of all-terrain vehicles against local environmental and conservation organizations. That's a much bigger issue that I won't get into here. If you'd like to read more about it, here is a recent article written by Louis Sahagun from the Los Angeles Times. "*Off-road vehicles to be banned at Oceano Dunes within three years*"

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-03-19/off-road-vehicles-will-be-banned-at-oceano-dunes-within-three-years>

Oso Flaco Lake, legend has it, earned its name from an incident involving Gaspar de Portola in 1769 when his ship stopped in the area and a group of Portola's men hunted a skinny bear and ate what little meat they could get from it. In Spanish oso flaco means skinny bear.

The area is one of the most scenic natural areas along the California's central coast, a unique geological mix of a freshwater lake, wetlands, and coastal sage scrub habitat all located amid a dune system. According to eBird, it's the hottest hotspot in San Luis Obispo County for birding with nearly 300 bird species reported, including western snowy plover, American peregrine falcon, California brown pelican, and California least tern.





*Oso Flaco — Boardwalk through the dunes.*



*Oso Flaco — Boardwalk above the lake.*

My personal discovery of the area began on a recent road trip to Morro Bay when my husband and I took a detour. After stopping in Los Alamos at our favorite bakery, Bob’s Well Bread, we decided to continue north on Rt 135 instead of taking the 101. Rt 135 weaves through large plots of marijuana farms. You get a big whiff of skunk and on a closer look realize those plants are not destined for the farmers market! As you continue north, Rt 135 connects to Highway 1, and nearing the tiny town of Guadalupe, the landscape flattens out into dusty farmland. The road that leads to Oso Flaco Lake is lined with heavy agriculture activity and you wonder if

there is any natural habitat out there, but finally you spot some trees ahead and arrive at the lake parking lot.

The trail is an easy and accessible 2 mile out-and-back which begins on pavement then becomes an impressive boardwalk that leads to the lake, crosses the lake, and up through a mind-blowing expanse of coastal sage scrub habitat. Once you reach the upper dune area you are rewarded with an ocean view and broader view of the entire landscape. It’s really spectacular. I highly recommend that you discover this hidden gem for yourselves!



*Oso Flaco — Boardwalk through the scrub.*



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON — October 2021 | By Jon Fisher

**F**all is the most exciting and most anticipated time of year for birders in southern California. Still, some years are better than others. Did this year live up to expectations, fall short, or exceed them? Now at the end of October, it's easy to make the case that it exceeded them.

If the spring of 2021 was defined by a near complete lack of vagrants, the fall was defined by a complete reversal of those fortunes. To call it epic isn't much of an exaggeration. Though there were few super rarities, unusual birds were discovered almost daily, with multiples of most expected eastern warblers and a variety of others represented in the mix.

A handful of early fall arrivals were recorded as were a number of late southbound migrants. It's inevitable that as the intensity of birding in the county increases, the more rarities and early and late records will be documented. Naturally, weather, climate change and year to year variation in movements, breeding success and distribution play a role as well. Regardless, the number of vagrants found is represented by an upward curve.

While the deserts of Los Angeles County were hot as always, summer on the coastal slope was rather mild. Wildfires- devastating for parts of central and northern California- had a very modest impact locally. A good thing, since we could all use a respite after the ugly fire season of 2020 and the woes of the ongoing pandemic.

In 2021, with La Niña conditions having developed and expected to remain in place, the odds for a drier than normal winter are higher. Hope lies in the fact that this is not certainty. An exceptionally long drought capped by the remarkably dry winter of 2020-2021 leaves us hoping for at least average precipitation this winter. Aside from providing water for agriculture and every other human need, bird habitats would benefit significantly.

Let's take a look at the greater and lesser birds of note from September and October...

A **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on September 28 (Keith Condon). Always unusual inland were two **Surf Scoters** at Quail Lake near Gorman on October 20 (Teresa Connell).

Seven **White-winged Doves** were detected during the period, an about average number. Also of interest are a very few **Spotted Doves** that persist south of downtown Los Angeles in the vicinity of Leon H. Washington Park. These were reported through early September. The population of this once common non-native dove has plummeted since the 1980s.

An **American Oystercatcher** was at the Ballona Creek mouth through September 28 and two were at the Los Angeles Harbor from October 9-16 (Tad Guidry). Another was at Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro on October 12 (Jonathan Nakai).

The **Pacific Golden-Plover** that spent the last three winters along lower Ballona Creek was back again as of August 28 (Femi Faminu) and reported there through October 7.

A **Ruff** was on the Los Angeles River in South Gate from September 26-27 (Richard Barth) and another was downstream in Long Beach from October 19-22 (Jeff Boyd).

**Stilt Sandpipers** were along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on September 9 (Mark Scheel), in Cudahy on September 19 (Mark Harris), at the Piute Ponds from October 6-20 (Chris Dean), with two birds present there from October 19-22.

Though it seems ages ago in terms of the birding action this fall, the **Red-necked Stint** first seen at Malibu Lagoon on August 22 continued through August 29, within our period of coverage.

**Semipalmated Sandpipers** were at the Piute Ponds on August 29 (Dessi Sieburth, Frank & Susan Gilliland) and again on September 5 (Ted Keyel, Mark & Janet Scheel) and at Malibu Lagoon on September 4 (Otto Mayer),

The long-staying **Sabine's Gull** continued at the Piute Ponds through September 15. Others were along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on September 5 (Becky & Steve Turley) and on September 25 (Jeff Boyd). Rare inland was a **Heermann's Gull** at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on October 14 (Keith Condon).

Rare in county waters were single **Manx Shearwaters** above Redondo Canyon off Redondo Beach on September 21–October 17 (Jon Feenstra) and off the Palos Verdes Peninsula on September 18–October 2 (Bernardo Alps).

At least three of five possible booby species were represented this fall, with a **Nazca Booby** near Santa Catalina Island on September 14 (Tracey B.), a **Masked/Nazca Booby** at the Los Angeles Harbor from October 9–10 (Tad Guidry), a **Brown Booby** off the Palos Verdes Peninsula on October 5 (Jon Feenstra) and **Red-footed Boobies** in San Pedro from September 24–26 (Bernardo Alps) and south of Long Beach from October 10–16 (Naresh Satyan).

**Neotropic Cormorants** included single birds continuing along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach and at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas through September 4 and up to two at the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys through October 10.

A **Little Blue Heron** cruised up and down the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach from September 18–October 22 (Layton Pace).

A handful of **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** continued in the county, with most reports coming from the Ballona Creek and Ballona wetlands area, Sims Bio Pond in Long Beach and Alamitos Bay. A few more were scattered over the remainder of the coast, mainly in the San Pedro and Long Beach area.

An early **Northern Harrier** was at Ryan Park in Rancho Palos Verdes on August 29 (Ryan Kay), while **Zone-tailed Hawks** were at Silver Lake Reservoir in Los Angeles on September 13 (Mark Wilson), continuing in Monrovia on October 8, over Altadena on October 15 (Luke Tiller, Catherine Hamilton) and near Diamond Bar on October 19 (Daniel Reed).

**Lewis's Woodpeckers** were present in above average numbers in September and October, with birds scattered through the San Gabriel and Santa Monica Mountains and on the coastal slope. High counts of thirty to fifty birds were at Jackson Lake near Big Pines during the first half of October.

Nine **Tropical Kingbirds** were found over the period, a slightly above average number. More unusual was an **Eastern Kingbird** on San Clemente Island on September 1 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole DesNoyers).

A **Bell's Vireo** at Jackson Lake in the east San Gabriel Mountains on September 22 was of interest, as this species is rarely detected in migration (John Yerger, Maribel Lopez).

Following a very good spring for the species, a dozen **Purple Martins** were found this fall, all on the coastal slope.

An excellent find was a **Dusky Warbler** in the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys on October 9 (Jon Fisher, Sarah Ngo). This species is an exceedingly rare near-coastal vagrant from late September through October, with just twenty-three records now for the entire state. For Los Angeles County, this was just the second mainland sighting and the third ever detected, with both previous birds found in October of 2017. Interestingly, a bird in eastern Kern County in 1997 represents the only truly inland California record. The Sepulveda bird was also California's longest staying Dusky Warbler, being reported for a remarkable eleven days. Was it present before October 9, and if so for how long? How many others passed through the state this fall unseen by birders? Intriguing questions, but alas unanswerable ones.

Surprising numbers of **Swainson's Thrushes**- given the time of year- were detected during night migration monitoring in early October, with eight recorded on October 8 in the Loz Feliz area of Los Angeles (Andrew Birch). Rather late were single birds at Maywood Riverfront Park in Maywood (James Maley) and at Oak Park Cemetery in Claremont on October 20 (Tom Miko)

**Lapland Longspurs** were on San Clemente Island from September 14-20 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers) and in the east Antelope Valley from October 17-20 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was at Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach from October 17-19 (Robert Hamilton) was the only one reported thus far. At least fourteen **Clay-colored Sparrows** were recorded over the period; above average numbers have been reported that past two autumns. Also of note was a **"Red" Fox Sparrow** at Pearblossom Park in the south Antelope Valley on October 14 (Kimball Garrett).

**Dark-eyed "Gray-headed" Juncos** were in Juniper Hills on October 7 (Kimball Garrett), at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas from October 12-19 (Keith Condon) and at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena from October 17-22 (Darren Dowell).

**White-throated Sparrows** were at the Piute Ponds on October 12 (Chris Dean) and at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on October 19 (Van Pierszalowski). Another two were at Solstice Canyon Park near Malibu on October 19 (Kathleen Waldron).

An early **Swamp Sparrow** was at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia on September 23 (Steven Kurniawidjaja) and others were at Lower Arroyo Park in Pasadena on October 12 (Jon Fisher) and in the Sepulveda Basin on October 20 (Jake Mohlmann).

**Green-tailed Towhees**, scarce fall migrants on the coastal slope, were in Rolling Hills on September 2 (Jim Aichele, Cathy Nichols), at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood from October 1-22 (Joyce Brady) and in the Sepulveda Basin on October 9 (Sarah Boscoe).

A dozen **Bobolinks** were found. This species varies in numbers from year to year, often dependent upon suitable available habitat.

In addition to our ten expected western migrants, no fewer than seventeen "vagrant" species of Wood-Warblers were recorded. These included an **Ovenbird** in Rancho Palos Verdes on September 15, eight **Northern Waterthrushes**, nine **Black-and-white Warblers** and eight **Tennessee Warblers**.

**Lucy's Warblers** were at Silver Lake Meadow in Los Angeles from September 3-30 (Andrew Birch), along the Los Angeles River in Van Nuys on September 3 (Otto Mayer), at Heartwell Park in Long Beach on September 5 (Robert Hamilton) and in Palos Verdes on September 20 (Adrian Vilca)

**Virginia's Warblers** were at the Piute Ponds from September 3-16 (Kathy Duret), at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on September 3 and again on September 20 (Keith Condon), at Agua Amarga Reserve in Palos Verdes from September 12-17 (Jonathan Nakai, Naresh Satyan) and at Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach on October 19 (Robert Hamilton).

An **American Redstart** was at Sand Dune Park in Manhattan Beach from September 21-29 (Jim Hecht), with two present there on September 23 (Chezy Yusuf), and at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on September 28 (Manuel Duran). A **Northern Parula** was at Banning Park in Wilmington on September 12 (Mark & Janet Scheel) and five **Magnolia Warblers** were recorded.



**Blackburnian Warblers** were on San Clemente Island from September 19–20 (Nicole DesNoyers) and again from September 28–29 (Justyn Stahl), at Occidental College in Los Angeles from September 29–30 (Ryan Terrill, Marky Mutchler) and in Duarte on October 20 (Steven Kurniawidjaja).

Six **Chestnut-sided Warblers**, eleven **Blackpoll Warblers** and six **Palm Warblers** were reported during the period. At the rarer end of the scale was a **Pine Warbler** on Santa Catalina Island- the first for the Channel Islands— on October 17 (Chris Dean) and a **Prairie Warbler** on San Clemente Island from September 15–20 with two there on September 19 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole Desnoyers).

Quite rare in the county was a **Canada Warbler** at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia on September 16 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

The **Painted Redstart** that spent last winter at Inglewood Park Cemetery was back as of September 24 (Russell Stone) and reported through October 22.

Five **Summer Tanagers** were found this fall, an about average number.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were at Entradero Park in Torrance on September 18 (Andrew Underwood), on San Clemente Island on September 28 (Laura Vandezande) and in Pasadena on October 15 (Darren Dowell).

**Indigo Buntings** were at Silver Lake Reservoir on September 25 (Andrew Birch) and in the Sepulveda Basin on October 18 (Mayer Otto). Typically far rarer, **Painted Buntings** were on San Clemente Island from September 3-5 (Justyn Stahl, Nicole DesNoyers), at Madrona Marsh in Torrance on September 7, and in the Sepulveda Basin from October 17-18 (Curtis Marantz).

**Dickcissels** were on San Clemente Island on September 19 (Nicole DesNoyers) and again from September 25-30 (Susan Meiman).

Where do we go after this stellar fall period? The end of migration is inevitably something of a letdown, but new late and wintering vagrants will be discovered in the coming months. Near coastal and coastal slope parks and green patches readily attract Neotropical migrants and others. Indeed, any good patch of habitat on the coastal slope as a whole can produce good wintering birds.

The county's deserts offer good birding opportunities in winter and even the chilly San Gabriel Mountains can harbor unusual birds. Time spent seawatching from various spots is always well spent, even if not always productive.

In addition to all the usual well-covered birding hotspots, there are ample opportunities to explore new and under-birded areas. One thing is certain. Whether you concentrate on your own local patch, travel throughout southern California, or something in between, birds will reward you in many ways. 🐦

*From Our Readers* articles that were submitted for the Nov/Dec 2021 *Western Tanager*, are now published exclusively on our blog pages.

[www.laaudubon.org/blog](http://www.laaudubon.org/blog)

# INTERPRETING NATURE

## Summer Fellows: Moving Forward, Working With Nature

By Arely Mendia Perez, October 2021

Los Angeles Audubon's Summer Fellows Program has been a strong learning resource for many alumni from the Greenhouse Program, Kenneth Hahn Environmental Internship, and the West Los Angeles College Conservation Studies Certificate Program. This program provides hands-on experience along with further environmental education learning. Summer Fellows work on habitat restoration at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook and Kenneth Hahn Recreation Area. They grow California native plants in the greenhouse, install plants and irrigation systems in the parks, and observe local wildlife, such as Western Fence lizards, Gopher Snakes, Cotton-tail Rabbit, Red-tailed hawk, and Green Lynx spider, just to name a few. Working alongside nature is a big deal for the Summer Fellows, and the program provides them with access to nature as a career path.

Summer Fellows leave the program with valuable skills and experience, and we are thrilled when they move into other career and high education opportunities. This year, we are happy to inform you that Alan Cooper, Angela Mendia, Sam Mah, and Melvin Harris, all former Summer Fellows, are now employed by California State Parks.

### Alan Cooper

Alan has been a Summer Fellow for two years now, from the summer of 2020 to this summer, 2021. He first joined the Conservation Studies Certificate Program with West Los Angeles College. Once he had completed his certificate, he joined Summer Fellows. He planted native plant species, watered many important restoration sites, and helped at the California Least Tern colony enclosure in Venice. Alan's goal is to become a park ranger with the US Forest Service. He is currently working as a park aide for the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook and will be attending Humboldt State University - another great step toward his goal!

### Angela Mendia

Angela has been a Summer Fellow for four years, starting in 2018 to this summer, 2021. Since her sophomore year in high school, she was part of the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program, graduating in 2016. She joined our Summer Fellows program and has been a keen observer of arachnids at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. She has done all types of restoration and environmental work at the two parks, and she has proven herself a great nature photographer. She currently works as a park aide at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook. Having completed her degree in Television Production at CSU Northridge in 2020, Angela's goal is to go study entomology at the graduate level, pursuing a career in Arachnology.



Alan Cooper in the California State Park electric Vehicle at the top of the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook.



Angela Mendia in the Greenhouse at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, showing off her California State Park uniform.

## Sam Mah

Sam Mah has also been a Summer Fellow for four years, starting in 2018 to this summer, 2021. He started the Kenneth Hahn Environmental Internship in 2016, working alongside Director of Outdoor Education, Cindy Hardin. Sam has planted many native plants at both parks and led volunteer groups in habitat restoration. He is very passionate about wildlife and nature. Sam is knowledgeable in environmental education and has been a hard worker for four years as a Summer Fellow. He currently works at the Los Angeles State Historic Park as a park aide as well. Sam's goal is to be a conservation biologist or wildlife rehabilitator.



*Sam Mah is showing off his California State Park shirt, as part of the uniform he is getting for his first week at the Los Angeles State Historic Park.*

## Melvin Harris

Melvis Harris has been another one of our star Summer Fellows alumni from years past. Melvin was an intern in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program when he was in high school, studying Western Fence Lizards for his project at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook. As a Summer Fellow, he assisted with habitat restoration, native plant germination, native plant installation, and watering important sites at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, Kenneth Hahn State Recreation State Area, and Leo Politi Elementary. In December, Melvin completed his BS in Wildlife Management from Humboldt State University. He currently works at Sue-meg State State Park (formerly called Patrick's Point SP) in Humboldt County.



*Melvis Harris in his California State Park uniform at Sue-meg State State Park. The Humboldt green scenery behind him.*

We are very proud of our Summer Fellows alumni for continuing their environmental career path with California State Parks. We wish them luck as these early-career professionals continue in their endeavors. 🐦



# MONTHLY PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS— Nov. & Dec. 2021



## Dr. Naomi Fraga — Plant Conservation in Southern California

*Wednesday, November 10, 2021  
7:30 PM–8:30 PM*

Dr. Naomi Fraga will present ongoing research by the California Botanic Garden to support rare plants in the Amargosa River Basin, their seed banking in collaboration with other botanic gardens to protect the genetic legacy all the rare plants of California, and why that is effort is so urgent, and finally her work in plant conservation advocacy to get Endangered Species Act listing status for Tiehm's buckwheat and the conflicts we face towards achieving a renewable energy future (e.g. lithium mining and solar).

Naomi Fraga is Director of Conservation Programs at California Botanic Garden in Claremont, CA; she received her Ph.D. in Botany from Claremont Graduate University, and she also holds a M.S. in Botany from Claremont Graduate University and a B.S. in Botany and Biology from California Polytechnic University, Pomona. Naomi serves as Secretary for the Southern California Botanists, is a chair of the Environment and Public Policy Committee for the American Society of Plant Taxonomists and is Treasurer for the Amargosa Conservancy.

The program will be online, at: <https://bluejeans.com/432568808/4291>

## Dr. Desirée Narango - Native Plants for Native Wildlife in LA and Beyond

*Wednesday, December 8, 2021  
7:00 PM–8:00 PM*

Because plants form the foundation of food webs, the small management choices you make in your yards and gardens can have far-reaching impacts on habitat for wildlife. In this talk, Desirée will speak about her research studying birds and pollinators in urban green spaces across the US (including LA!). She will also discuss how plant-animal interaction data can help us decide what plant species might best support people and wildlife.

Dr. Desirée Narango is a David H. Smith Conservation research fellow currently based at the USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research focuses on species interactions and habitat relationships of plants, insects, and birds in human-dominated landscapes such as yards, urban forests, and farmland. Desirée has not yet had the opportunity to visit LA but hopes to admire your exceptional hummingbirds someday.



The presentation will be online at: <https://bluejeans.com/816050899/7195>

# NOVEMBER—DECEMBER, 2021 BIRD WALK CALENDAR

## 1st Saturday

### Open Wetlands at Ballona Salt Marsh Nov 6 & Dec 4

9:00 AM—12:00 PM

#### Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve RSVP REQUIRED, LIMITED

The first Saturday of every month (EXCEPT AUGUST), from 9 a.m. to noon, Los Angeles Audubon Society hosts the “Open Wetlands” event at the Ballona Salt Marsh. Binoculars will be available to borrow, and volunteers will help visitors view aquatic invertebrates through microscopes, learn about the unique ecosystems found at Ballona, and view birds through powerful spotting scopes along Ballona Creek.

To ensure social distancing, RSVPs are required and a limited number of slots are available.

TO RSVP: Please contact Cindy Hardin at [cindyhardin@laudubon.org](mailto:cindyhardin@laudubon.org) to reserve your time. Please call (310) 301-0050 if you have any questions.

Enter through the gate located in the northeast corner of the parking lot behind Alkawater/Gordon’s Market, in the 300 block of Culver Blvd. in Playa del Rey.

## Franklin Canyon Bird Walk (SFVAS)

Sun Nov 14 & Sun Dec 12

8:00 AM—10:00 AM

### Sooky Goldman Nature Center

#### RSVP REQUIRED, LIMITED

This event is organized and led by San Fernando Valley Audubon Society.

Paula Orlovich will lead this walk in one of L.A.’s hidden gems. Walk is limited to ten people due to narrow hiking trails. Contact Paula by text to reserve a spot: (818) 481-5605

Further information here:

<https://www.sfvaudubon.org/birding-spots/franklin-canyon/>

## 2nd Sunday

### Open Wetlands at Ballona Salt Marsh Nov 14 & Dec 12

9:00 AM—12:00 PM

#### Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve

The second Sunday of every month (EXCEPT AUGUST), from 9 a.m. to noon, Los Angeles Audubon Society hosts the “Open Wetlands” event at the Ballona Salt Marsh. Binoculars will be available

to borrow, and volunteers will help visitors view aquatic invertebrates through microscopes, learn about the unique ecosystems found at Ballona, and view birds through powerful spotting scopes along Ballona Creek. To ensure social distancing, RSVPs are required and a limited number of slots are available. Please contact Cindy Hardin at [cindyhardin@laudubon.org](mailto:cindyhardin@laudubon.org) to reserve your time. Please call (310) 301-0050 if you have any questions.

Enter through the gate located in the northeast corner of the parking lot behind Alkawater/Gordon’s Market, in the 300 block of Culver Blvd. in Playa del Rey.

No baby strollers please.

## 3rd Saturday

### Bird Walk at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area

Nov 20 & Dec 18

8:00 AM—12:00 PM

Leaders: Ann and Eric Brooks

This walk covers landscaped parkland, an artificial creek, and lake and natural and restored areas of Coastal Sage Scrub habitats within the Baldwin Hills. We are likely to see many of the resident birds such as Black Phoebe, Cassin’s Kingbird, California and Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow, Red-tailed, Red-shoulder and Cooper’s Hawk.

The park entrance is off of La Cienega Blvd. between Rodeo Rd. and Stocker St. After passing the entrance kiosk (\$6.00 parking fee) turn left (leading to the “Olympic Forest”) and park in the first available spaces. (4100 S. La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles 90056). Binoculars provided.

## AUDUBON CENTER AT DEBS PARK

### COMMUNITY BIRD WALK

Sat Nov 20 & Sat Dec 18

8:00 AM—10:00 AM

#### RSVP REQUIRED

This event is organized by AUDUBON CENTER AT DEBS PARK and cross-posted by LA Audubon.

WHAT: Community Bird Walk with local birder Adam Levitan

WHEN: Third Saturday of every month at 8AM. The walk will go until

about 9:30-10:00am.

WHERE: The Center is located at 4700 N. Griffin Ave. Meet in the Center courtyard (straight ahead as you walk through the black decorative gates). Free parking is available in the lot or along Griffin Ave.

#### WHAT TO BRING:

Hat and/or sunscreen, Reusable water bottle

Comfortable walking shoes, Binoculars and/or field guides if you have them. If not, no worries! We have binoculars available to borrow onsite.

#### PLEASE KEEP IN MIND:

Masks are encouraged and social distancing will be maintained.

No previous birding experience required!

All ages are welcome, however these walks are best suited for adults and kids ages 9 and up. Attendees should expect to be walking for about an hour and a half. Please plan accordingly. Center binoculars will be sanitized after each use.

*Attendees must RSVP beforehand.*

Contact [debspark@audubon.org](mailto:debspark@audubon.org) with any questions!

## Beginner’s Bird Walk

### Will Rogers State Historic Park

Sun Nov 21 (Dec TBD)

9:00 AM—11:00 AM

#### RSVP Required, Limit 10

Join leaders Julie Hanson and Jane Klein for a beginners bird walk at this beautiful coastal location. Leaders will cover the basics of binocular use, bird identification, and common Los Angeles birds. Experienced birders welcome too. Some binoculars available to borrow. Children ages 8 and up welcome with parent. Please RSVP in advance by text to (310) 922-8153; limited to 10.

Meet at the picnic tables next to the parking lot at Will Rogers State Historic Park at 1501 Will Rogers State Park Road in Pacific Palisades.



# MEMORIAL GATHERING — SAT. NOV. 13, 2021

*In honor of Eleanor Osgood, Irwin Woldman and Don White*

Please join us as we gather together in appreciation of the lives of three valued members of the Los Angeles birding and conservation community, Eleanor Osgood, Irwin Woldman, and Don White.

A bird walk originating at the Japanese Garden of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area will start at 8 am. At 10 am, we will gather to pay respects and honor these three unique and important individuals. A food truck will then be on site for a picnic.

Please RSVP to: [susancastor@laudubon.org](mailto:susancastor@laudubon.org).



*Eleanor Osgood*



*Irwin Woldman*



*Don White*

