

WESTERN TANAGER



Photo Courtesy of www.audubon.org, Pine Siskins-Adults, Photo by Judith Roan, Audubon Photography Awards

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and various bird rehabilitation organizations are recommending that people in southern California stop feeding birds until April or May when Pine Siskins have left the area. Even though there have not been many cases here (compared to Northern California), they are being cautious. In any case, feeders should always be cleaned regularly, along with the ground below the feeders. Salmonellosis is transmitted mainly through the accumulation of droppings around the feeders and birdbaths. CDFW recommends draining birdbaths as well, but an alternative would be to clean the baths out at least daily.

The no-feeder recommendations do not extend to hummingbird feeders, but those feeders should also be cleaned and sterilized regularly as standard practice.

Pine Siskins have been in the Los Angeles region in small numbers this winter (with larger numbers in a few areas), but most people do not have them at their feeders. However, this disease is known locally from Lesser Goldfinches and other finches as well.

So in summary, it is probably most prudent to stop feeding birds for the next month or two, but if you choose to continue feeding, make sure the feeders and surrounding areas are as clean as possible. —Kimball Garrett

SEE ALSO: CDC Salmonella Outbreak and Wild Songbirds
<https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/typhimurium-04-21/index.html>



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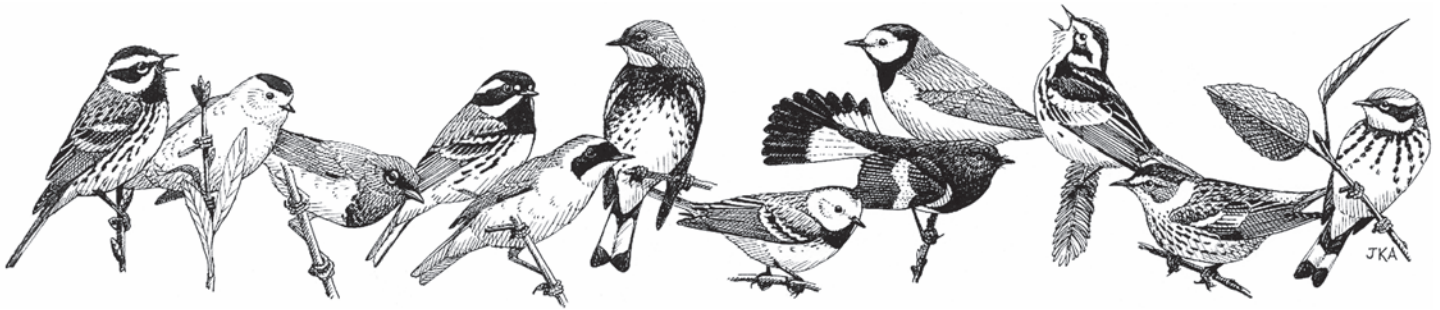
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To Be Advised, visit www.laaudubon.org



BIRDS OF THE SEASON — April 2021 | By Jon Fisher

With the onset of spring, rainfall remained sparse, though this was hardly unexpected. With precipitation at about twenty-five percent of normal, we are now past any chance to make up the deficit. Much of the western United States is in the same situation, or worse. Thankfully, plants and animals are fairly well-adapted to deal with these conditions- at least in the short term. Humans, with their voracious appetite for water, are less so.

Despite the lack of rain, things were looking spring-like by March, perennial streams were full of water and the landscape generally looked green. The stage was set for passerines arriving from the south.

Birds have sacrificed a lot to be able to fly and migrate long distances. Teeth and solid bones have been lost through evolution, ultra-light feathers have replaced fur and scales and many other physiological adaptations have been adopted. Yet despite all this, their abilities remain incredible. Most migratory songbirds weigh a few pennies or less, yet they are capable of persevering through inclement weather, over large bodies of water and manage to travel hundreds or even thousands of miles each spring and fall.

These migrations are one of the main attractions of birding, as they offer the seasonal changing of birds and the excitement of vagrants. It is clearly an advantage for the birds too, giving them the chance to exploit temporary resources on breeding grounds and retreat to more hospitable climates in winter.

Following the early arriving swallows, other migrants began to move through in March,

with Western Kingbirds, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Warbling Vireos, Bullock's and Hooded Orioles and others making an appearance. By the first half April, activity ramped up considerably.

Late April is the peak of spring migration and while there are many good places to see birds, there is none better than Bear Divide in the western San Gabriel Mountains. This relatively recently discovered location is already well known to birders. It is one of the top locations in the state to observe migrating songbirds.

Through a geographical happenstance, this location funnels northbound migrants up a long canyon and ultimately through a narrow divide that offers easy access by vehicle. Peak days last spring offered 10,000 migrants in a single morning, with numbers plummeting three to four hours after sunrise. Since a majority of these birds continue on their flight path rather than alighting, this does make for a great opportunity to see large numbers of birds and to sharpen skills identifying these birds in flight.

This spring at the divide, a bird-banding station has been active here in addition to a bird census and thus far results have been excellent. As good as Bear Divide may be, migrants will be moving throughout the county and nearly any location can be worth covering.

As always there was a nice mix of birds to be found in the county in March and April. Here is a look at what was around.

The returning “**Eurasian**” **Green-winged Teal** continued at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera through March 25.

Late **Common Goldeneyes** were at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas from March 31–April 9 (Keith Condon), on the Los Angeles River in Glendale from March 31–April 6 (Andrew Birch), at the Piute Ponds on March 31 (Dessi Sieburth, Susan Gilliland) and on the California Aqueduct in the west Antelope Valley on April 10 (Kerry Ross).

A few **Spotted Doves** persist in Compton south of downtown Los Angeles, with up to two reported there through April 3. **Inca Doves** continued in Lake Los Angeles, with two being reported there through February 21. **Common Ground Doves** were reported in Cerritos through April 4, with up to four observed there. Lastly, a **White-winged Dove** was in San Dimas from March 16–22 (Marcus England).

Scarce in winter were single **Vaux’s Swifts** in Glendale through February 19 and over Glendora on February 20 (Michael Peralez).

A half dozen **American Oystercatchers** were noted coastally over the period, with probably fewer than that number involved in these records. Muddying the waters is the fact that the purity of these birds is in question; as many of them carry at least some Black Oystercatcher genes. This makes for a complex identification challenge with a mix of obvious hybrids and less obvious intergrades, with a few pure Americans thrown in for good measure.

The returning wintering **Pacific Golden-Plover** along lower Ballona Creek in Marina del Rey was reported through March 17. Over two dozen **Mountain Plovers** continued at the A&G Sod Farm in Palmdale through March 3 and a half dozen were northeast of there through February 21.

Rare in the county as spring migrants were three **Red Knots** at Del Rey Lagoon in Playa Del Rey on April 15 (Johnny Ivanov).

Also quite scarce in the county was a **Franklin’s Gull** along lower Ballona Creek on March 15 (Gregory Gladkov).

Lesser Black-backed Gulls included a continuing bird at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera through February 27, one at Peck Road Park in Arcadia through February 20 and one at Malibu Lagoon on March 22 (Becky Turley).

Neotropic Cormorants were present in relatively high numbers for such a recent colonizer of the county. Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas hosted varying numbers through April 16, with a maximum of seventeen present there (Keith Condon). Others were reported from at least ten locations on the coastal slope of the county.

A continuing **American Bittern** was at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB through March 24 and the **Little Blue Heron** at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro was seen through March 6.

Up to three **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** continued at Alamitos Bay through March 4, while up to five were at Sims Bio Pond in Long Beach through April 13. Another was at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh through April 3.

At least two **California Condors** continued to be seen in the Gorman and Quail Lake area through March 5.

A rare find in spring was a **Broad-winged Hawk** over the San Gabriel Mountains near Cedar Spring on April 6 (Loren Wright).

Swainson’s Hawks were much in evidence, with the greatest numbers moving along the south facing slopes of the San Gabriel Mountains in March. The highlight was a flock of 400 seen on March 13 (Lance Benner).

Zone-tailed Hawks were in Monrovia through April 5, in Pomona on March 2 (Robert Talmadge), above Glendora on March 5 (Johnny Ivanov), in Duarte from March 8–20 (David Hurst), in Altadena on March 20 (Luke Tiller) and in Arcadia on April 12 (Steven Kurniawidjaja). These records may represent as many as four individuals.

A wintering **Rough-legged Hawk** continuing near Gorman through March 5 was enjoyed by many birders. It has been a long wait as this species was last recorded in the county in 2012.

Three **Long-eared Owls** in Wildwood Canyon in Santa Clarita on February 19 were of interest (Colleen Lee). More expected were small numbers in the Antelope Valley at the Piute Ponds, Apollo Park and elsewhere.

Northern “Yellow-shafted” Flickers were in Manhattan Beach on February 20 (Michael Renicke), at Angelus Rosedale Cemetery on February 21 (Brad Rumble) and continuing at the Village Green Condominiums in Los Angeles through March 28 and at Bonelli Regional park in San Dimas through March 9.

A wintering **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** continued at Heartwell Park in Long Beach through April 16. New birds were found at Lake Balboa in the San Fernando Valley on March 20 (Jane Stavert, Amy Worrell) and at Runnymede Park in Winnetka from March 22-23 (Richard Barth).

The wintering **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at Madrona Marsh continued through February 25 as did one at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach through March 21.

The returning wintering **Brown-crested Flycatcher** at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills remained through February 21 as did one at Michigan Park in Whittier through February 23.

Tropical Kingbirds continued at El Dorado Park in Long Beach through February 17 and at Entradero Park in Torrance through April 10 and in the Ballona area through March 2. Others were at Whaley Park in Long Beach from February 26-28 (Brian Daniels) and at the DeForest Wetlands in Long Beach through March 12.

An early **Olive-sided Flycatcher** was at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on April 1 (Derek Hameister) and the wintering **Greater Pewee** at Lacy Park in San Marino was reported through March 26.

Hammond’s Flycatchers were at Whaley Park in Long Beach from February 24-March 12 (Chris Dean), continuing at Alondra Park Reservoir through March 1, at Pan American Park in Lakewood through March 24 and at Carr Park in Glendale through March 27. Another was found at Lake Balboa in the San Fernando Valley on March 5 (Larry Schmahl). A **Dusky Flycatcher** continued at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach through April 2.

Pacific-slope Flycatchers continued at Lacy Park in San Marino through February 19, at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills through February 19 and at Descanso Gardens in La Canada on February 21.

The returning wintering **Eastern Phoebe** along the Los Angeles River in Glendale continued through March 27 at the Glendale Narrows Riverwalk.

A **Cassin’s Vireo** was at the Village Green Condominiums in Los Angeles on March 14 (Don Sterba). Remarkably early was a singing **Bell’s Vireo** at Rio de Los Angeles State Park in Los Angeles on February 24 (Marcos Trinidad).

A **Bank Swallow** was at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on March 12 (Rod Higbie) and a **Purple Martin** was there on April 1 (Keith Condon). An influx of **Purple Martins** occurred in mid-April with four near Palmdale, thirteen in San Pedro, one in Harbor City and one at the Piute Ponds on April 14. Several of these were recorded through April 16. This species is now generally a very scarce spring transient in the county.

The **White Wagtail** along the Los Angeles River in Vernon continued through March 21.

A **Grasshopper Sparrow** at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera remained through February 26, a half dozen **Clay-colored Sparrows** were present during the period and a “**Red**” **Fox Sparrow** continued in Rolling Hills through February 25.

Six **Dark-eyed “Pink-sided” Juncos** were present, while **Dark-eyed “Gray-headed” Juncos** continued at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas through March 31, in Juniper Hills through April 14, in San Dimas Canyon through February 27.

At least eight **White-throated Sparrows** were in the county during the period.

A **Swamp Sparrow** continued along the Los Angeles River in Glendale through February 22 and another was found at Del Rey Lagoon in Playa Del Rey on March 12 (Michael Hilchey).

A half dozen **Green-tailed Towhees** were present, represented by both new and continuing birds.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds continued at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh through March 30 with up to ten reported there.

The wintering **Baltimore Oriole** at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills continued through February 21, a **Hooded Oriole** was at Los Altos Park in Long Beach on February 27 (David Ornellas) and a wintering **Scott's Oriole** continued in Llano through March 13, with two there on March 4.

A **Rusty Blackbird** first discovered on November 29 lingered on San Clemente Island through March 18.

Seven **Black-and-white Warblers** were present over the period.

A **Tennessee Warbler** was at Rotary Centennial Park in Long Beach from February 22-26 and a **Lucy's Warbler** was there from February 24-March 1 (Robb Hamilton).

Scarce in winter was a **Nashville Warbler** at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills from February 19-20 (Tracy Drake). Others were at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on February 20 (Keith Quinlivan) and at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino through March 11.

The wintering **American Redstart** at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach was seen through March 6. **Palm Warblers** continued at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera through April 4, at El Dorado Park in Long Beach through April 16 and at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood through April 14.

Always a nice find, a **Black-throated Green Warbler** was at Col. Leon H. Washington Park in Los Angeles from April 3-9 (Richard Barth). The easy to find wintering **Painted Redstart** at Inglewood Park Cemetery continued through March 14.

A **Summer Tanager** continued at Wardlow Park in Long Beach through April 14. Others were at Pt. Dume in Malibu on March 8 (Justin MacMartin) and at the Village Green in Los Angeles through April 13.

A **Black-headed Grosbeak** that wintered in Pasadena was seen through March 10 and another continued in Glendora through February 18.

An **Indigo Bunting** was in Woodland Hills on April 11 (Craig Didden).

As we head into May and the end of spring migration, things should get more interesting. Migrant passerine numbers will slowly decrease, but mountain birding will become more productive and the possibility for vagrants increases.

While on the subject of mountain birding, we continue to feel the effects of last summer's disastrous Bobcat Fire. A few additional areas within the closure area have reopened, but others are slated to remain closed for another year. Impacts on favored birding areas have been mixed, with some surviving relatively intact and others severely burned.

Buckhorn Campground and Chilao Flat are in relatively good shape, but Charlton Flat, Santa Anita Canyon and the San Gabriel River's West Fork appear to have fared less well. Whatever areas are accessible will benefit from birder coverage to document both immediate changes in birdlife and those over a decades-long recovery.

Though this past winter's scant rainfall will have an impact, breeding activity will be pronounced through June. As always, it is a good practice to watch for any behavior indicating reproductive activity and enter that data on eBird lists. The more information these lists contain, the greater their value.

By the time the next column appears, southbound shorebirds will have done so as well. There is but the briefest of lulls between the spring and fall movements of birds. 🐦

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK ...

By Cindy Hardin, Director of Outdoor Education | Photos by the author



From vacant lot to stream side habitat And right next to one of the busiest train lines in town.

I am what could be called a highly engaged voter. I never miss an election, and often host a pre-election get together with friends to hash out myriad propositions and measures that are on our state ballots. I make a point to do research on the various measures, and like to think that my choices are informed.

However, I am the first to admit that post-election, my attentiveness vanishes. Of course, I do track the outcome to take inventory of the winners and losers, and like anyone, am gratified when results align with my choices. But some of the propositions and bonds that win in elections take years to make their way through the maze of government agencies on their way to implementation. Proposition O is a case in point. Proposition O? “Which one was that?” you might ask. And that would be understandable, as Proposition O was passed in 2004! Its purpose was “to improve water quality by reducing pollutant loads to the impaired waters of Los Angeles.” An additional goal was “creating or enhancing open space, habitat or recreation benefits” in our city.

Now, after all these years, a project has been completed on the west side of town that is a wonderful example of how the bond money

from Proposition O was spent. Additional help came from a State bond, the result of another long-ago ballot item, Proposition 84 (2006). Proposition 84 was also intended to improve water quality on a state wide basis, and to be administered by the State Water Control Board.

The project, known as the Westwood Greenway, is an innovative process that utilizes sunlight, plants and filtration to clean urban run-off before it reaches Santa Monica Bay. It is located between Westwood Boulevard and Overland Avenue along the light rail “E” (formerly known as the Expo) line that links downtown LA to Santa Monica. The history of this site goes back even further than the voting of the two bonds that have provided funding.

Until 1953, the track was the route of the Santa Monica Air Line, one of the many electric rail systems that once crisscrossed the region. Believe it or not, during the first part of the 20th century, Los Angeles was said to have one of the best public transportation systems in the entire United States. However, this fantastic system saw its demise by mid-century, as a network of freeways, increased private ownership of automobiles and far flung suburban communities became the preferred model for Southern California. The former Air Line tracks were used by freight trains until the mid-80’s, after which a 200-foot-wide space, bordered by homes, between Westwood and Overland, remained fallow. In 1989 Southern Pacific Railroad put the land up for sale, and within a year the parcel was purchased by the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. The ultimate result of this purchase was the installation of the “E” line.

By 2007, debate continued about what to do with the right of way space that was on either side of the railway. Originally, it was proposed that the land be used to create parking lots to accommodate 170 cars. Neighborhood activists who had pushed for the train line itself pushed for an alternative plan – one that would encourage people to be less dependent on cars, facilitate safer biking across the city, and create an island of habitat amidst urban sprawl, while cleaning up the waters that course through our hidden storm drain system.

Prior to the settlement of Los Angeles, a vast network of seasonal and perennial streams ran down from the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains and across the LA Basin; primary documents from early explorers attest to this fact. Much of our underground storm drain system follows the historic path of these streams; such was the case with the Overland storm drain, which echoes the course of long-ago Brown Canyon Creek, with its source in Beverly Glen (formerly Brown Canyon). An idea to have the trains cross under Overland Avenue to mitigate traffic delays and pedestrian danger at the rebuilt train tracks was blocked by the massive storm drain. The negative of the inability to run the train line underground became a positive: the idea to “daylight” Brown Canyon Creek and run this newly created (albeit artificial) stream along either side of the tracks for the new train line.

Citizen advocacy among a group of local residents gathered steam, and the idea of a parking lot was replaced with a new plan. Sleuthing through government records revealed that funds through the afore-

mentioned propositions would be appropriate use to finance the Greenway. Plans were discussed, conferences occurred with city agencies like the Bureau of Sanitation, and finally, on June 27, 2013, ground was broken on the project. The daylighting of the creek was an integral component.

Daylighting of long buried streams is an idea that is taking hold on a national level. Exposing urban run-off to sunlight helps to destroy undesirable bacteria. Filtration prior to daylighting removes trash and debris that is channeled from our streets into unfiltered storm drains. And plants within the stream capture toxic heavy metals and excess fertilizer, further cleaning water before it is discharged into Santa Monica Bay. The artificial stream is designed to clean over 1 million gallons of year-round, urban run-off – spring water which is polluted along the way to the Ocean by everything from plastic bags to brake dust.

Although these concepts seem simple, the implementation requires lots of moving parts. First, at the Overland end of the project, water is diverted from the Overland Storm Drain and filtered through a hydrodynamic separator. It is then pumped to the surface, where it runs west along the north side of the tracks toward Westwood Boulevard. The water flows under the tracks through a culvert, and re-emerges, via a set of pumps, on the south side of the tracks. The water heads east, and then flows back into the Overland storm drain just south of where it was first pumped up – with far less pollutants and trash.

Although the process is far from natural, and relies on lots of machinery and equipment to achieve, the result is a new ecosystem. Advocates for the Greenway realized that a new island of habitat could also be a part of the project, and successfully pushed for a huge palette of native plants be installed along the new waterway. Trees like Sycamores and Alders were included in the plans, and many species of native wildflowers were chosen in addition to these streamside tree species. Hummingbird Sage, California Poppies, native Yarrow and Phacelia species are all present at the Greenway. A decomposed granite pathway meanders through the site, and strategically placed boulders provide seating areas that will be used in the future for educational gatherings, in the form of field trips for schools, both local and those connected by the train line. Students will be able to take public transportation to learn about the project, thus eliminating the need to spend scarce funds on buses!

Public events are also part of the program here, and the Westwood Greenway group (a nonprofit corporation formed by the project's advocates) is already staging tours on the third Sunday of each month. As the vegetation takes hold, butterflies and other insects can be seen busily flitting about, lizards are present to feast on these insects, and native birds previously not seen in the area are showing up. Recently, a Great Blue Heron was documented on the site, probably on the hunt for one of those insect loving lizards!

To further the site's education potential, signs throughout the Greenway share information about the engineering angle of the project and the role that native plants play in the life of native pollinators and the food web. The digital web also has a place at the Greenway. Visitors with mobile devices can use the sign's QR codes to extend the signs' information, including hearing the language of the land's traditional caretakers, the Tongva people. An audio tour is also available through a free app. The WestwoodGreenway.org web-

site can be read in any of dozens of languages and includes information about sustainable landscaping and how to volunteer.

Another bonus to the project is the beautiful bike lane and pedestrian path that run along the south side of the tracks. No cars – just silent pedaling and padding past wildflowers and creatures, which is a lovely respite from urban hazards and noise that is experienced by dedicated bikers and walkers as they traverse city streets.

The Greenway is proof positive that our voices can be heard, first at the ballot box and then through citizen advocacy, to make our neighborhoods greener and more livable for both humans and wildlife. The success of this project is due in no small part to the dedicated efforts of those on the Greenway Committee, and I would be remiss if I failed to mention these urban environmental heroes. So, a huge thanks to Jonathan Weiss, David Wendell, Sean McMillan, Annette Mercer, Elektra Grant and Marilyn Tusher. And a humble admission that I was fortunate to work alongside them. One of the key members of the group, Sarah Hays, a native plant fan and expert, is sadly no longer with us, but her vision lives on at the Greenway. The Bureau of Sanitation and the City Council District 5 also provided great support and encouragement in the project, and are a wonderful example of city agencies working with the public to make Los Angeles a better place.

So remember: it is worth it to get out and vote, and even though we may lose sight of long ago election results, sometimes they eventually create a thing of beauty that is beneficial to all! And if you want to learn more about the Greenway, you can go to westwoodgreenway.org, which is full of information and beautiful images regarding the project.



*The water flows across the west side. Photo by
Cindy Hardin*

ABOUT CINDY HARDIN, DIRECTOR OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

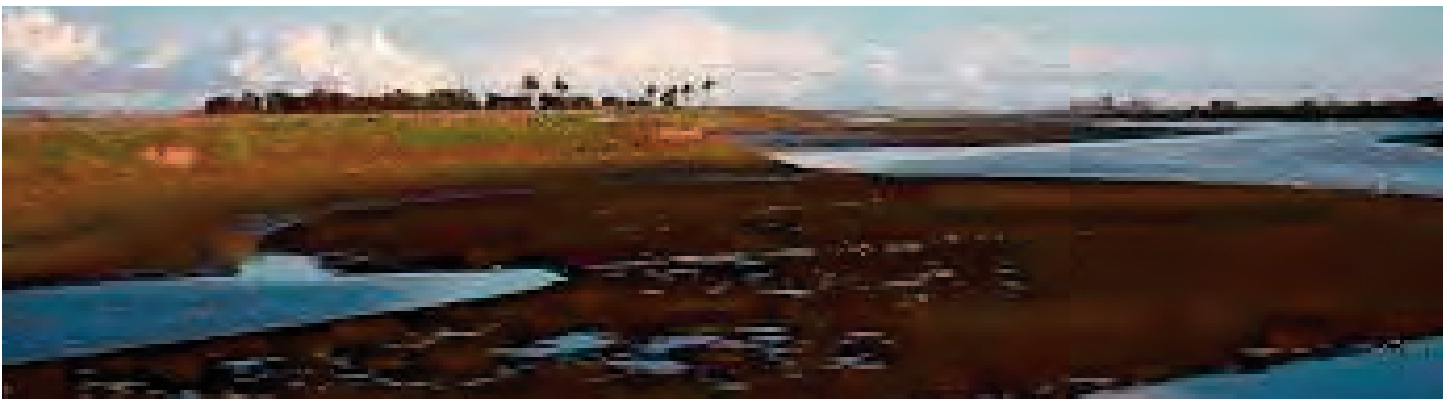
Cindy's early exploration of Nature was of the woods, ponds and lakes of Minnesota. In 1967 she and her family moved to California and settled in Huntington Beach, next to what is now the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve.

A fascination with the ocean and all things coastal California soon ensued. As a child, the birthday gift she requested every year was a trip to the tidepools in Laguna Beach. While growing up, most of her free time was spent outdoors and on the beach. She even chose her college, UC Santa Barbara, largely because of its location on the bluffs of Goleta.

Post-graduation Cindy continued a northward migration to San Francisco. This was the opportunity to learn about the Redwood Forests, rivers, wetlands and urban parks of the region. After 10 years in the city, the warmer climates of Southern California called her back home. In 1999 she had the good fortune to see a small ad in the LA Times, putting out a call for volunteer docents at the Ballona Wetlands. The program provides hands-on, site specific nature tours for the students of Los Angeles via a very popular field trip program. Within a few years she expanded her docent duties to Franklin Canyon, under the auspices of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. It became clear to Cindy that Environmental Education was the path for her, and in 2011 she joined the staff of the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

She is currently LAAS's Director of Outdoor Education, and manages programs that provide student field trips to both Ballona and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. The two programs provide a nature education experience for approximately 3,000 students annually. She also hosts a monthly Open Wetlands at Ballona, and is involved in a city project that has created native habitat and a daylighted stream along the "E" Line train tracks in Westwood, called the Westwood Greenway.

In her spare time she can usually be found outdoors, and enjoys a daily dip, year round, in the beautiful Pacific Ocean. Cindy feels extremely fortunate to work in a field that allows her to be out in nature most of the time, and gets great joy in sharing it with others. Although her position with Los Angeles Audubon Society is a job, it never feels like work!



Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve | Photo courtesy of: amigosdebolsachica.org

INTERPRETING NATURE

Snowy Plover Retrospective | By Judy Thompson, LA Audubon Volunteer



SNPL, YOU ASK? THE WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER HAS BEEN FEDERALLY LISTED AS threatened since the 1990s, and various agencies have been monitoring it along the Pacific Coast for decades. LA Audubon has been conducting surveys since 2007. It's estimated that just 2500 snowy plovers currently breed along the Pacific Coast.

Beach 8, Malibu was my SNPL quarterly survey home since 2012; the long stretch of white sand beach backed by one million-plus dollar beach house after another, sometimes no more than a long flight of steps between them, raised off the sand by a forest of struts and beams or concrete pillars under the houses. The houses front onto Malibu Road; Pacific Coast Highway is up the slope from road and houses. Black phoebes love lurking on the rocks near those houses and taking off to pluck insects out of the air.

In early 2012 LA Audubon's Volunteer Coordinator and now my friend, Stacey Vigallon, took me out on another Malibu beach to train me. We walked along for a half hour or so, then I was on my own, looking very Audubon-ish with clipboard, National Geographic's *Book of Western Birds*, binocs and cashew nuts. Soon a bank of large rocks appeared, protecting houses on a short cliff above from the beach and waves. A couple was sitting up there in lawn chairs. I waved, and the man clambered down the rocks. He approached me and introduced himself: Pierce Brosnan, it was. I said, "Yes, I know you, Mr Brosnan." He motioned to his wife, Keely Shaye, and she also came down and we chatted. They are active environmentalists and were glad to see Audubon looking after things. So much for my first day – no plovers.

In fact Beach 8 doesn't have snowy plovers. All Washington, Oregon, and California beaches must be surveyed regardless of their being known to harbor these endangered little birds. Tides are very important on Beach 8, which I had to learn. Get it wrong, and there is no beach to be seen, and you understand why the houses are raised from the sand. I see marbled godwits (with bill curving up to the heavens), whimbrels (bill curving down),

sanderlings, willets whose dullish brown feathers light up with white wing flashes when flying, black-bellied plovers – in winter not a black belly in sight, the odd heron or egret, brown pelicans, black phoebes near the houses and of course gulls. I don't like gulls.

One day I was clambering down the sandy slope to start my survey, and on a whim walked to my right, not to the left where I needed to go, over to the wrack line – seaweed deposited at the crest of the tide line. That's where snowy plovers nest. Lo and behold – snowy plovers! There were a few of those tiny birds in their little depressions in the sand – so exposed and vulnerable to beach walkers and dogs. I was so excited to see them. But alas – that was Beach 7; didn't count.

Another time I was doing my walk close to the surf, which was rolling onto the shore in high waves. All of a sudden there were three tall pointed fins in a diagonal row, right in the breaking waves close to the beach. I was too stunned to pull out my phone and snap a picture. As soon as I got home I researched the type of fin I had seen. Could it really have been orcas? That was the only fin that fit the bill (so to speak). I told Stacey and she said it could have been. I'll never know, but I'll never forget. Anybody know?

I persuaded my husband, a good photographer and an architect, to accompany me one time. He wasn't all that keen. As we were driving along Malibu Road, we approached a construction trailer with large black letters on it: ANDO. "Wait – stop!", my husband said urgently. I did. It was a house being built, designed by famed Japanese architect Tadao Ando, winner of the 1995 Pritzker Prize in Architecture – right there on Beach 8. My husband was thereafter quite keen to accompany me on my quarterly surveys, with the goal of checking on the progress of construction. He even got in that house one time. Snowy plovers and I were afterthoughts.

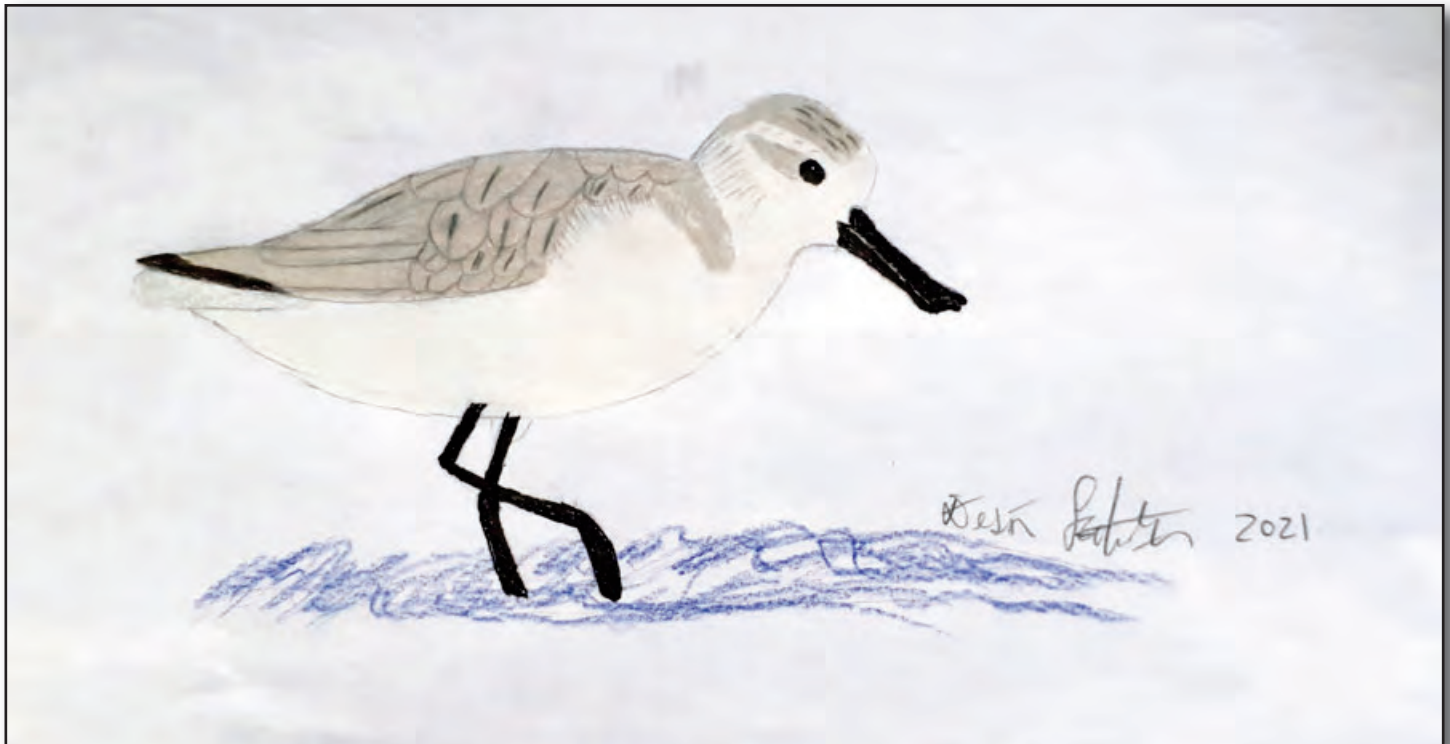
My husband and I took leave of LA for a short year and a half in 2018-19 and went back to London to live, for a lark (again, so to speak). We lived a short distance from the Thames, and I walked along that wide tidal river most days, for exercise and because we had no car. I supplemented my Beach 8 sightings with swans ("mute swans"), Egyptian geese, Canada geese (just as annoying there as they are here), mallards. From the window of our flat I watched a magpie couple build their nest in a young tree not much bigger than their nest. The fledglings got away without my seeing them.

I've just completed my last survey on Beach 8 (I'm old and creaky), but my seven years flew by (so to speak). I am ever so glad I participated, and will monitor our Western Snowy Plovers by reading Stacey's reports. 🐦

YOUNG BIRDERS

Protection of Migratory Birds Requires International Cooperation

By Dessi Sieburth



Spoon-billed Sandpiper | Drawing by Dessi Sieburth

At the northern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula in the southeast of Mexico, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird alights on a small branch. Weighing just three grams, this bird is preparing to begin its first spring migration. As dusk settles over the Yucatan shoreline, the hummingbird takes flight and heads out over the Gulf of Mexico. After flying 900 miles during the entire night without food, water, or rest, the hummingbird is exhausted, having lost almost half its body weight. Then, it sees the color that will save its life—the green trees of the east Texas shoreline. With the goal in sight, the hummingbird summons all its remaining energy to reach the shoreline, descends into a patch of flowers, and soon regains the lost energy and body weight by eating small insects and flower nectar. This incredible journey between Mexico and United States, however, is short compared to the migration of other bird species. The Pectoral Sandpiper migrates more than 8,000 miles between the Alaskan tundra and Argentina—passing through nearly a dozen countries along the way. Since many migratory birds stop in several different countries to refuel and rest, international cooperation to protect the habitat of these migratory species is necessary for the continued survival of these birds. Various instances of international cooperation have occurred; however, much work remains to be done to break the barriers between countries when dealing with environmental protection.

Conservation of migratory species is especially critical in Central and South American countries. Brazil has the highest deforestation rate among all countries, and Venezuela, Bolivia, and Mexico are not

far behind (Butler 2020). In these countries, rainforests and cloud forests are being cut down or burned for agriculture, cattle grazing, settlement, and timber. In Brazil, specifically, the Amazon rainforest has been destroyed largely to meet a growing demand for beef, soy, and land. The United States, on the other hand, has actually increased the amount of forest within its borders, most likely due to widespread conservation efforts (Butler 2020). By some estimates, the United States is considered to be the tenth most biodiverse country in the world, while Brazil is the most biodiverse country (Butler, 2016). Bird diversity follows a similar trend; 1,170 species of birds have been seen within United States borders, but Columbia, which shares large swaths of rainforest with Brazil, has recorded 1,881 species in an area nine times smaller (ebird.org). Thus, it seems logical that the majority of conservation efforts should focus on these Central and South American countries. Lindsey et al (2017) developed conservation scores for countries across the world based on the ecological contribution (number of species present), protected area contribution (percentage of habitat protected), and financial contribution (percentage of GDP allocated to conservation). By multiplying the three scores together, Lindsey et al (2017) derived a conservation score for each country. Countries in Africa, with their large wildlife reserves for big cats, ranked highest, while countries in South America ranked lowest. Countries in North America ranked very high as well, coming in just behind Africa. The studies show that the countries with the highest biodiversity are benefitting least from conservation efforts.

Economic barriers contribute to this difference in conservation efforts between countries. Lindsey et al (2017) found that wealthy countries allocate a much higher percentage of their GDP to conservation efforts than developing countries, widening the gap in conservation efforts between wealthy and developing countries. The United States has ten times the amount of total wealth as all Latin American countries combined, so it seems logical that these developing countries would devote much less funding towards conservation. Therefore, in order to encourage developing countries to implement conservation efforts, it seems necessary to provide financial incentives for conservation.

Despite the barriers that have limited conservation efforts, numerous initiatives that benefit migratory birds are demonstrating that these barriers can be overcome. One particularly successful project has been to promote the production of shade grown coffee. Coffee is a major crop in Central and South America and is “second to only oil in dollar amount and trade importance” (Seavey 2003). With such a large impact on the global economy, large amounts of land in Central and South America are dedicated to growing coffee. Like many other crops, coffee has been grown as a monoculture at the expense of rainforests. Therefore, some farmers have begun switching to growing coffee plants directly under the canopy of the rainforest. Seavey (2003) surveyed shade-grown coffee plantations in Central America and found 24 species of migratory songbirds that use them. To raise awareness of the benefits of buying shade grown coffee in the US, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center began offering Central and South American Countries a Bird Friendly® certification for their shade grown coffee. Numerous American companies such as Trader Joes and Starbucks have begun selling shade-grown coffee grown from Central and South American farms. The increase in publicity of shade-grown coffee may encourage more farmers to make the switch.

One bird species in particular needs international cooperation to be saved from possible extinction. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper, with a population of only about 250 individuals, is one of world’s rarest and most beautiful birds. It nests in the Siberian tundra and winters in the marshes of Thailand. Few people can access its remote nesting grounds in Siberia, and there are several protected reserves for this species and other shorebirds in Thailand, and yet Spoon-billed Sandpiper populations, along with other shorebird populations, have plummeted recently (Weidensaul 2018). The reason for this decline lies within their migration route between Thailand and their Siberian nesting grounds. They stop at the Yellow Sea of China, where many marshes that these birds rely on are being converted to salt-making ponds. “The rate of estuary loss... was more than 100,000 acres per year,” says Weidensaul. It was clear something urgent needed to be done to save the remaining marshlands for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, and international cooperation proved to be the answer. “U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson... has worked closely with the Chinese government on wetland conservation issues,” writes Weidensaul. The Chinese government proceeded to plan restoration of tens of thousands of hectares of land along the Yellow Sea back to its original, marshy state. However, the

issues facing the Yellow Sea can not be solved entirely through policy. Once again, social and economic issues are barriers to successful conservation. The depletion of fish stocks in Yellow Sea, has led fishermen to turn to hunting shorebirds, including the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, by setting up nets along the shore that trap the birds (Weidensaul 2018). Although this type of hunting is illegal, it is very difficult for the Chinese government to regulate it, meaning it will continue unless local communities find ways to make a living through sustainable fishing and hunting. Conservation organizations can play a role in shaping these decisions through education and financial incentives in turn for the protection of birdlife.

Many birds have symbolic meaning and cultural importance to us. Jimenez (2020) refers to birds as “shared symbols in our lives” that “connect us to places we have never been and to people we have never met.” Birds are capable of connecting people across borders; one day, a bird may be feeding in a residential backyard in Argentina; a week later, this same bird may be singing in a park in Wisconsin. Many migratory species hold cultural significance as well. For example, the Bar-tailed Godwit is a shorebird that completes an incredible 7000-mile journey from Alaska to New Zealand every year and its return to New Zealand marks good fortune and signifies the beginning of spring to the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. The Bar-tailed Godwit, however, uses the Yellow Sea during migration, and is therefore threatened by habitat loss and illegal hunting. Another migratory species of cultural importance is the Pacific Golden-Plover, which migrates between Alaska and Hawaii. Native Hawaiians believe that the Pacific Golden-Plover helped Polynesian explorers discover the Hawaiian Islands and consider this bird to be a protector spirit (Jimenez 2020). The importance of migratory species to many cultures provides further incentive for protecting these species along their migratory routes.

Protecting the breeding, wintering, and migration ranges of migratory birds requires the cooperation of many countries. Economic and political barriers present as challenges to successful conservation, but conservation efforts such as shade-grown coffee and protection of the Yellow Sea show that these barriers can be overcome. Much work remains to be done, however. We have lost three billion birds over the past 50 years (Axelson 2019), and climate change will likely accelerate declines in many species. However, providing safe areas to these birds across their ranges is a step in the right direction. World Migratory Bird Day (May 8, 2021), created in 1993, is a holiday designed to spread awareness of the need for international protection, and provides hope that this protection will continue to increase. Birds are citizens of the world which deserve global protection and we can be part of the solution to the global conservation challenge. We can help migratory birds by purchasing bird-friendly shade grown coffee which is available at local Whole Foods Stores. 🐦

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Dessi Sieburth is a freshman at Stanford University, and he has been a birder since he was 8 years old. Dessi's interests include field ornithology as well as researching molt and non-native bird species. To learn more about Dessi, please check out his website, protectingourbirds.com.



Sun-grown coffee (left) is a monoculture of coffee bushes. Shade-grown coffee (right) offers more habitat for forest species. Photos: Chris Foito/Cornell Lab Multimedia; Guillermo Santos). Photo Courtesy of www.ALLAboutBirds.org

BIRDS DIE HITTING WINDOWS – LET’S GET TO WORK STOPPING THESE DEATHS, *By Jim Cubie*

Hundreds of millions of birds die every year hitting the windows in our homes. We have all seen the photos of dead birds that hit urban buildings. Ten times as many die hitting our home windows.

Humans know that a dark space on the side of a building is a window. Birds do not. They see in it a reflection of the safe space they have just been flying through, and crash into the window and die – though some fly off, to die later from internal injuries or stunned, eaten by predators.

At my home a catbird decided to fly from the front of my home to the back. I heard a sickening thud. It had flown straight into my glass front door. Look at this photo (Photo 1) that I took just after the bird died hitting my front door. What do you see in it? On the ground, the dead catbird. In the window, my reflection. Likewise the catbird saw a wide open space behind him reflected in the glass front door in front of him. As this article was being written a bird hit a member’s window and left this impression (Photo 2).

Please visit the web address that follows and view and download the (25) page PDF booklet it and read the sections that most interest you.

Consumer Guide to Bird Window Strike Prevention

1. Basic Science
2. Why Typical Install of Window Alert Does Not Work
3. How Many Windows Should I Do?
4. Two Basic Window Strike Prevention Strategies - UV Does Not Work
5. Threat Factor Ratings
6. Commercial Systems Described
7. DIY Options
8. Cost Comparison of Principal Systems
9. Factors to Consider In Choosing A Window Protection System
10. Effect on Vision and Photos comparing installed systems
11. Glass Doors
12. Window Washing

<https://birdfriendlyyards.net/consumerguide/>



Photo 1: Dead Catbird and what the bird sees.



Photo 2: Bird Strike impression

LOS ANGELES AUDUBON MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES

Program May 12, 2021; 7:15 pm - 8:30 pm

The Disastrous Border Wall — What Now?

The Biden administration must reckon with the severe injustices the previous president inflicted on the communities and wildlife of the borderlands. In this presentation, Laiken Jordan, borderlands campaigner with the Center for Biological Diversity, will discuss the efforts of a coalition of environmental, tribal and human rights groups on both sides of the border who seek to tear down the wall and restore protections to the beautiful border region. Before joining the Center, Laiken worked with the National Park Service studying threats to wilderness character throughout the Rocky Mountain West. He has also worked as a legislative fellow in the U.S. House of Representatives, a trail builder and a clam farmer.

RSVP to Carol Babeli carolbabeli@laaudubon.org to secure a spot in the webinar. Program will also stream to Facebook Live.

Program June 9, 2021

To Be Advised, visit www.laaudubon.org



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PHOEBE

by Michael H. Lester

As suddenly as she appears, she vanishes, and with her something inside me is lost. A void in place of the fullness she brought that first day and the days, weeks, and months that followed. Her absence is not soon forgotten in the dizzying array of pretenders who come and go in their dispassionate anonymity.

*I harbor
an image of Phoebe
in black and white
wearing a feathered gown
beneath her scruffy crown*

Skittering through shrubbery like thieves in the night, these white-crowned sparrows in their private hideaways guard their secrets in the flora. The California Towhee swoops down from the fence to wriggle its way into the maze of wire cages meant to support the tomato plants but repurposed to keep out the squirrels.

*a maze of mesh
guards the blueberry suet
for the local birds—
they enter from all directions
leaving their small gratuities*

With the arrival of spring, Phoebe and a friend have returned to the garden, perching alternately on the overhead wires, the tomato cages, the spent orchid stems, and on the wooden fence. It's good to have her back as a regular customer, her absence having made the heart grow fonder.

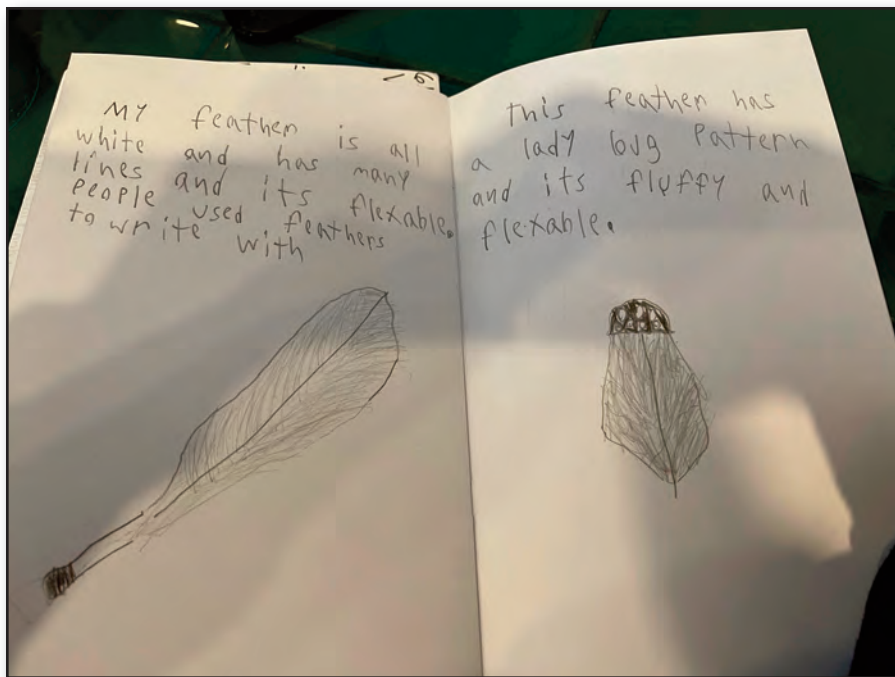
*there are no words
to express my gratitude
for this Phoebe
who has chosen my yard
as a favorite hunting ground* 🐦



Photo: Jonathan Coffin/Flickr

LAAS NATURE JOURNALING PROGRAM & ZOOM

By Dorothy Steinicke, LA Audubon Docent | Photos & Journal pages by Students



Feather Journal Pages

There is not much that the Audubon docents at Ballona Wetlands and Kenneth Hahn Park enjoy more than walking a group of students through our wonderful wetlands and uplands, seeing their eyes light up when they see something new or come to understand how things are interconnected. So, we were as disappointed as our students when all field trips were canceled due to COVID in March 2020.

Most of us docents still had the means and ability to get out into natural spaces, and that was a wonderful way for us to cope with the new world of living in a pandemic. But we thought about all the students who usually visit Ballona and Kenneth Hahn and wondered if they were getting experiences in nature, if they were even having opportunities to get outdoors.

As everything seemed to be moving to Zoom, some of us hatched a plan that would enable us to work with students and would allow students to observe and experience nature, even if they weren't able to leave their homes.

We would have a nature journaling program where we would encourage students to observe and journal on the aspects of nature that were readily available to them.

For our first round of nature journaling we partnered with Science teacher Loret Landavazo at Walnut Park Middle School, a teacher who has frequently brought students to our field trips. For eight weeks we met for an hour a week with students in one

of her classes.

We provided each student with a Nature Journaling Kit that contained a journal, colored pencils, tape measure, and a magnifying glass. Additionally we supplied them with six small pots, some potting soil, seeds and a modified plastic soda bottle that they would make compost in.

The project was carried out by Cindy Hardin, Los Angeles Audubon Director of Outdoor Education and docents Dorothy Steinicke, Martine Tomczyk and Joyce Karel. Every week we met with the students on Zoom. We started our sessions with the students all together in a big group and then split into four breakout groups.

Every week had a different focus.

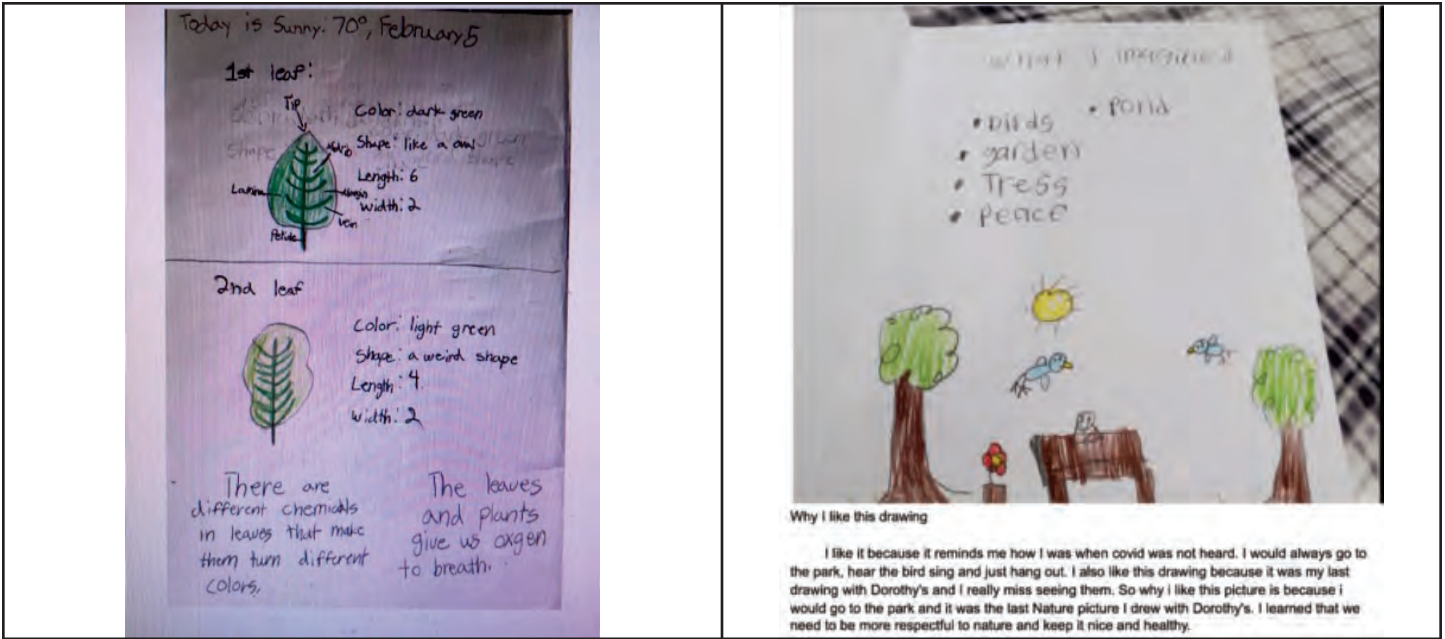
In week 1 we introduced the idea of journaling and we all planted our seeds for green bean, tomato, milkweed and basil plants.

In week two, a few students already had plants sprouting. We then learned about soil and decomposition. The students, and facilitators tore up old dried leaves and cut up fresh plant clippings and vegetable food waste into the compost making 'rot bot'.

In week three, the students came to the session with leaves from two different plants. They learned about the function of leaves to photosynthesize and 'feed' the plant and thus initiate the food chain that feeds all members of the animal kingdom as well as the respiration that gives the plant vital nutrients and, coincidentally, provides oxygen for all the members of the animal kingdom. The students journaled about their two leaves, drawing and describing them.

In week four, students learned about flowers. How flowers function to produce seeds and assure the continuation of that species of plant. Students came to the session with a flower that they examined, described and drew.

In week five, students learned about the results of flowers; fruits and seedpods. They examined the fruits and seedpods they had brought to the session and drew and described them.



In week six, students learned about insects and how important they are to pollination, decomposition and as a part of the food web. We shared photos online of specific varieties of insects and drew and described them.

In week seven, we talked about birds. Students examined feathers and drew and described them. We talked about the vast variety of birds and some of their different attributes and habits.

In week eight, we reviewed what we had all learned. Most students had large plants ready to be transplanted into gardens, although some plants had failed. Most students had a container full of compost that will help their plants grow when they are transplanted. We encouraged the students to continue to observe and be curious about the natural world.

We asked the students what they had been surprised

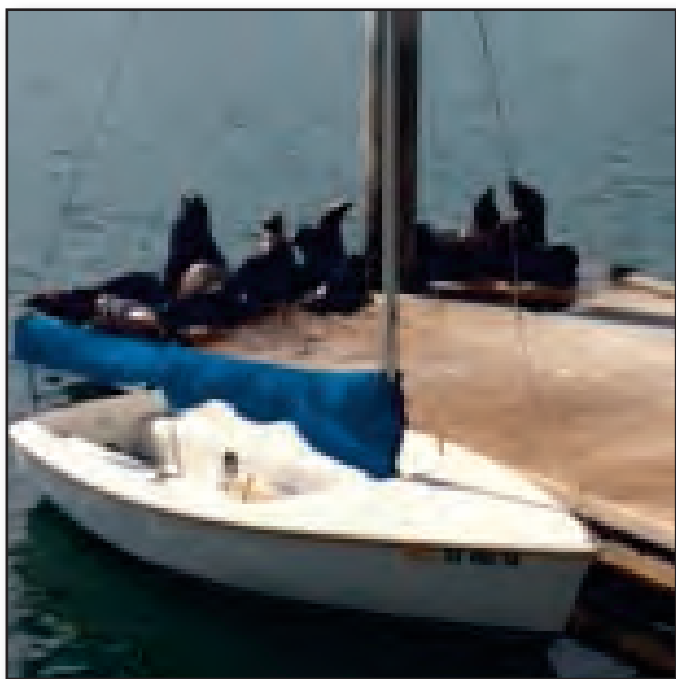
to learn. The students told us that they were surprised to learn how many insects there are in the world. They were surprised to learn that an ostrich is the fastest runner on two legs and that bee hummingbirds can be mistaken for insects. Several students said that they were amazed to learn first hand that soil could be made from dried leaves and vegetable peelings. All the students who had success with their plants were enchanted at what was created with their care. In the eight weeks of our sessions one student had flowers and small beans on her green bean plant.

Just as when students come to Ballona and Kenneth Hahn, we never really know what they are taking away from the experience. Sometimes things we didn't imagine. We are hopeful that participating in this project may have been a step in the direction of wonder and interest in our magnificent natural world.



“TWEENS” WILL BE “TWEENS”

by Judith Deutsch | Photos by the Author



As an older adult, I can still remember my years as a “tween,” visiting Will Rogers State Beach in Pacific Palisades/Malibu with my parents and friends—too young to drive and too old to hang with Mom and Dad.

Imagine my surprise last weekend as I approached a large group of youngsters and adults gleefully watching the antics of “tween” and mature sea lions, clustered on and around the docks alongside Burton Chace Park in Marina Del Rey, displaying the same behaviors we did on those lovely beach trips a half-century ago!

With spring and a blustery touch in the air, our “tween” sea lion pups were frisky—shoving each other off the docks, barking uproariously, and up for a dip in the channel harassing the ducks diving for lunch. They were adorable and we loved watching their shenanigans.

Like our parents in the ‘60s, the adult sea lions had escaped the roughhousing, hustle, and bustle of the boisterous pups by moving farther up the dock and hiding out behind a rowboat and various anchored vessels, where they enjoyed an undisturbed snooze and basked in the sun. Occasionally, a precocious junior would venture along the dock and attempt to climb over Mom, Dad, and company, receiving a whack from one of the adults.

Sound familiar?

I love experiencing how “twens” will be “twens” no matter the species! We ended our afternoon walk just blocks from the sea lions along the Ballona Wetlands pedestrian and bicycle path adjoining Fishermen’s Village, where parts of the latter are in danger of being commandeered for homeless housing. The area is peaceful and frequented by egrets, herons, hummingbirds, and assorted wildlife. Although I am a herd animal, like the rest of the human race, I appreciate having the opportunity to seek out moments of raucous activity or meditative silence in the natural world around us. These are areas we need to defend and protect from encroachment. 🐾

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

MARY & ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRDS

By Tiffany Larsen

In honor of upcoming Mother's Day, I would like to pay a little homage to my mother Mary's favorite bird, the Hummingbird. My late mother's adoration for these iridescent, fascinating little creatures, inspired her to collect and display an elaborate collection of fanciful tea cups, paintings, books, prints and other various doodads. She once even hired an artist friend of mine to paint a mural on her bedroom wall that included a splendid red-throated hummingbird.

My mother always kept several ornate red-glass hummingbird feeders on her back porch. Every morning she would sit with a cup of tea and watch these tiny marvels flitting about sampling the sugary liquids that she lovingly bestowed upon them. If she noticed one of her feeders was empty, she'd drop everything and scurry around gathering supplies in order to mix up another batch of this life-sustaining nectar.

Throughout my life I always appreciated the beauty, speed and persistence of these little birds, but I've noticed that since my mother's passing, I feel an extra special connection to them. Luckily, in the front yards of most of the houses in my neighborhood one can usually spot a bright red, dangling, half-full feeder swinging in the breeze and being patronized by a small army (or should I say Air Force?) of delightful but determined little birds.

The species most common in California is called *Calypste anna*, which are slightly larger than in most other parts of the US, and they are also the most vocal. They don't exactly sing, but they do make short & sharp chirpy sounds and you can hear them almost buzzing around your yard as if they were miniature WWI Ace's flying about and dive-bombing things that they encounter during their flight path between the trees and the feeders. Sometimes they seem to be aggressive and almost fly right up into your face. The mating season for *Calypste anna* is from December to May, and therefore walking around my charming old-fashioned

neighborhood in the springtime sometimes reminds me of an old World War I epic film, only including a squadron of bedazzled, highly-pitched, and stunningly beautiful tiny-winged pilots.

Instead of being afraid or annoyed, the most common reaction I have when this "attack" occurs, is more akin to bewitched wonderment and awe. It is as if these little birds are trying so say, "Hey! Hello!....and Watch out! You're just a little too close to my feeder my friend!"

I realize that this sounds a bit silly, but since my mother passed, it almost seems like the hummingbirds have been flying even closer to my face than before. It makes me wonder if they have been tasked with sending of messages of greetings and love from beyond. I now imagine that they are saying, "Hey! Mary says a quick hello!.....but watch out, because you're standing dangerously close to my feeder!"

As mentioned above, the Latin name for the most common of California's hummingbirds is *Calypste anna*, which translates to Anna's Hummingbirds. I hope Anna doesn't mind sharing this honorific title with my mother Mary, at least just in title of this story. Mary did indeed love these magical little beings! I certainly hope that wherever she is now, she is able to have cups of tea in the morning and watch her ruby-throated friends flying about in all of their magnificent and kaleidoscopic splendor! 🐦

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

