

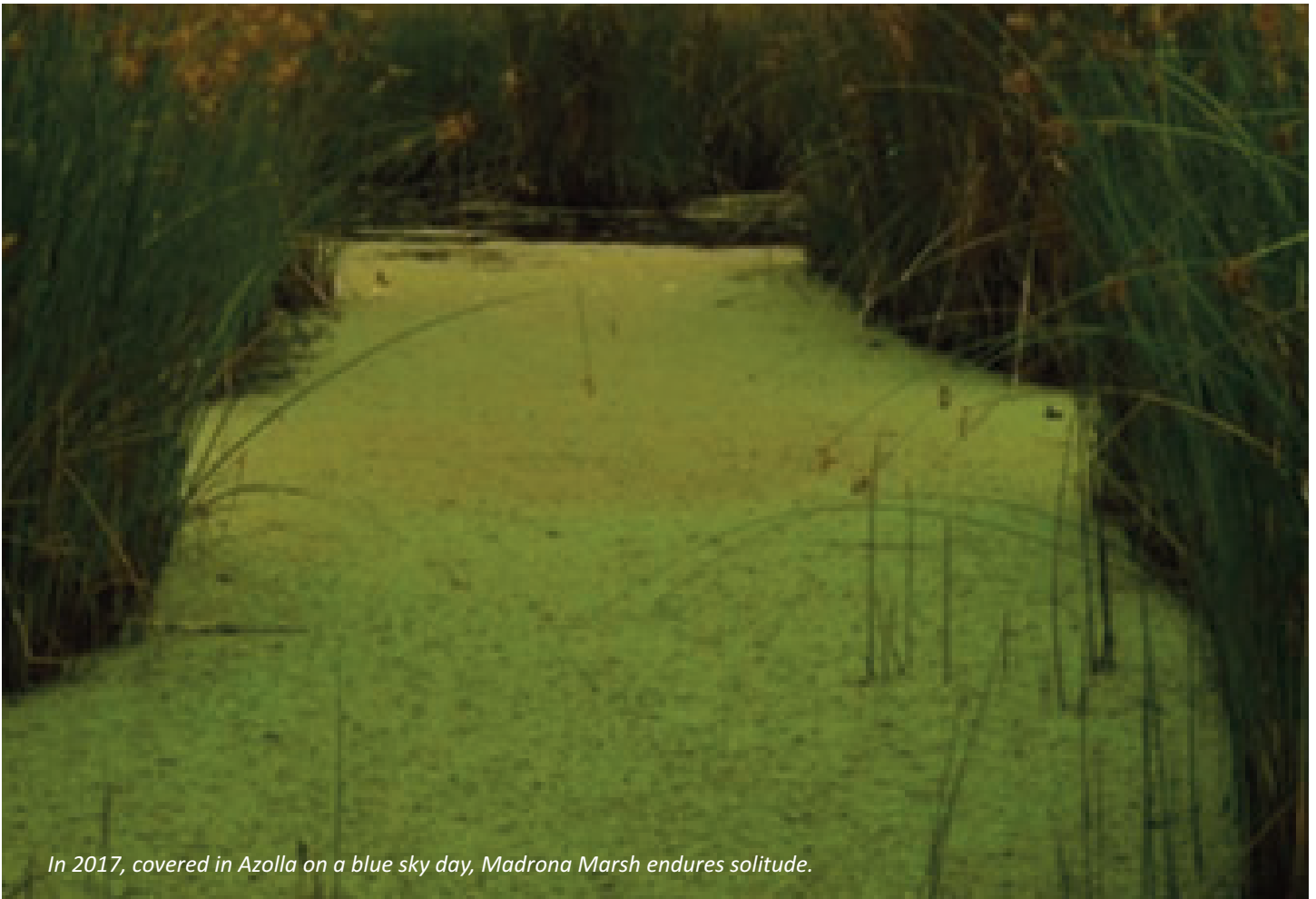
WESTERN TANAGER

Mar–Apr 2024 | Volume 90 Number 4

Attack of the Azolla!

by Damien Brown

Azolla covers habitable locations within the nature preserve at Madrona Marsh as an invasive species. A thin layer of Azolla, a free-floating freshwater fern, covers the marsh with alternating hues that range from fluorescent green to dark burgundy. Ferns are some of the first plants to originate before gymnosperms and angiosperms evolved. Azolla proliferates, as the lifeline dates back 50 million years through the Eocene era. People today who visit the marsh have stated, “It looks like sand.” If it looks like sand to humans, it looks like sand to the birds. As the sun simmers through the seasons in California, the algae multiply by the numbers, covering any hospitable pocket of water located at the marsh. Azolla has symbiotic nitrogen fixation properties within the leaves. These nitrogen fixation properties are usually found within the roots of plants to exchange or gain nutrients from the soil. The Azolla also contains cyanobacteria which makes their food from sunlight and photosynthesis making them virtually unstoppable on a sunny day. In 1972, the federal



In 2017, covered in Azolla on a blue sky day, Madrona Marsh endures solitude.

government banned dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, once used as a mosquito repellent, which has repercussions, causing bird eggshells to thin, resulting in staggering numbers to decrease bird populations. Thus Azolla moss is an introduced species that mitigates West Nile Virus, a virus that is transmitted from a bitten bird carrying virus to a human being. As the silence surrounds the park, the serene atmosphere collides with the number of birds at the Southern California Marsh. Moss is sometimes used as an alternative method for mosquito repellent, which ends up removing birds.

The now deserted park from Azolla and not DDT in (2023), once teeming with birds, is entirely different than in (2016). Snowy egrets (*Egretta thula*), Eurasian wigeon (*Anas penelope*), American Coot (*Fulica americana*) and Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) once congregated in flocks having mating dances. These numbers have plummeted due to my prediction that the illusion of no water in the marsh causes birds to pass by and stop at another location. Birds migrate for miles in search of a pit stop to gain a surge of hydration, bathe, or find food. Water is the glimmer of hope that shines bright for these birds and provides a plethora of resources. Scarce water regions

in the marsh also make the birds aggressive and territorial instead of united. I would see birds drop from the sky, and now I see them passing the marsh.

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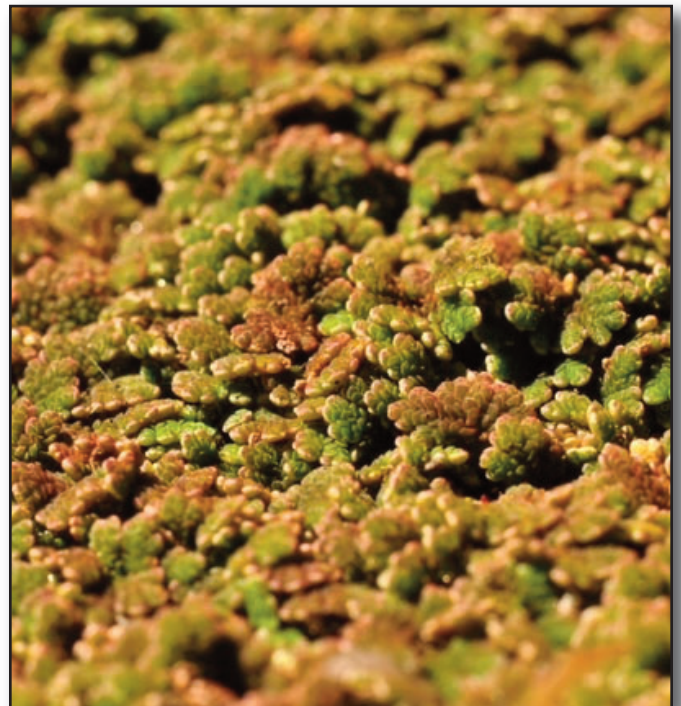
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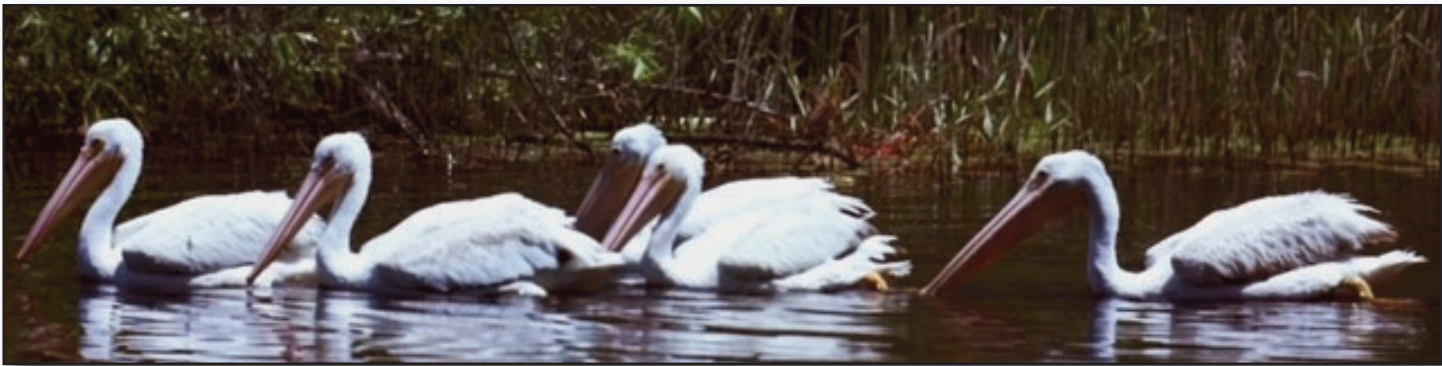
Damien Brown, was born and resides in Southern California. He has a deep passion for nature and is experienced in photography. He is a Behavioral Science Graduate from California State University Dominguez Hills with a B.A. in Psychology. He is soon to be forthcoming with a M.A. degree in Psychology.



In 2024, a resurgence of the Azolla lurks in the shadows, casting a burgundy-tinged color in the water.



A close-up of the Azolla that is layering the waters and land of the Marsh.



Five American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) graze the waters.



Two American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) preen in the waters.



In the distance, an American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) is seen on the water.



A flock of six American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) soaring high above the Marsh.



An American Coot (*Fulica americana*) is bathing in the water. Over the years, these birds seldom migrate, making the hospital water source crucial.



A Cooper Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) stands on the water.



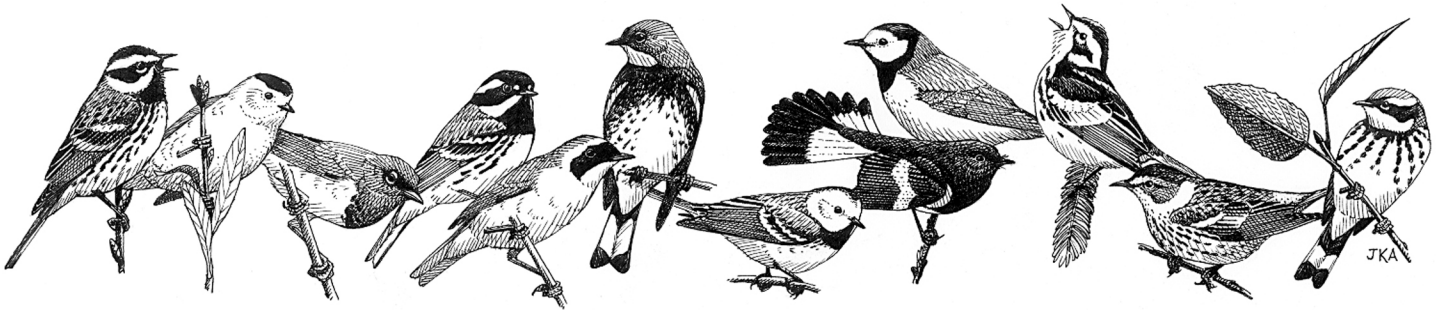
A Cooper Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) looks up after drinking some water from the Madrona Marsh.



The proximity of water shows the Azolla presence.



The Azolla covers the water at the Marsh.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Jon Fisher

Birds of the Season- March 2024

As Los Angeles County birders know well, every month offers excellent birding opportunities. February and March held up their end this year. Continuing wintering rarities were well represented and notable new birds turned up at an impressive pace.

The fact that most of the coastal slope of the county is highly developed for human use certainly impacts a variety of species, but it is not a great impediment to avian diversity.

Though most of spring passerine migration has yet to occur, some species were already moving north; waterfowl, Turkey Vultures, Swainson's Hawks and swallows among them. Other early arriving Neotropical migrants were noted as well, and numbers increased as we moved through March.

Spring breaks early in southern California, with warming temperatures and an irruption of plant and animal life. This is especially true following a wet winter. Early February delivered on the promise of El Niño with a major multi-day storm. More wet periods followed, taking us above normal for the entire season by early March.

Two out of every three years in the current century have experienced below average rainfall, so while this second wet winter in a row is welcome, the next drought period may be only a couple of years away.

Here's a look at birds of note in the county from late January through March.

A **Red-necked Grebe** at the Ballona Creek mouth through March 17 was the only one reported during the period.

First detected in mid-January, up to four **Lesser Nighthawks** continued through March 9 at Santa Fe Dam. The dates and number of birds constitute an unprecedented winter record for this species.

Quite scarce in winter were four **Vaux's Swifts** in Pico Rivera from February 10-15 (Christine Jacobs, Kim Moore, Becky Turley), three in Silver Lake on February 10 (Otto Mayer) and two at Alondra Park Reservoir on March 7 (David Moody).

A nice county rarity was a **Broad-billed Hummingbird** at a residence in Glendora from February 10-March 24 (Kristin Joseph). Numerous birders availed themselves of the easy opportunity to view and photograph it.

The returning wintering **Pacific Golden-Plover** near the Ballona Creek mouth was reported through February 3 and a Mountain Plover continued on San Clemente Island also through February 3.

Rare away from offshore waters were **Black-legged Kittiwakes** at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro on March 1 and at Malibu Lagoon on March 23 (Omar Alui). A **Laughing Gull** was along the Los Angeles River in Maywood from February 17-March 3 (Mark Wilson) and a Franklin's Gull was in the same area on March 16 (Luke Tiller). As evidence of their increasing presence in the county, about a half

dozen **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were reported during the period.

Rare inland was a **Pacific Loon** continuing at Quail Lake near Gorman through March 18.

A **Brown Booby** was in Santa Monica Bay off Marina Del Rey on March 7 (Jon Feenstra).

A **Western Cattle Egret** was at Quail Lake near Gorman on March 13 (Matt Brady) and over two dozen **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** were recorded, primarily at Alamitos Bay and Ballona Lagoon.

Establishing just the third record for the county, a **Glossy Ibis** was at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on March 21 (Jon Feenstra).

Ten **California Condors** along Templin Highway near Castaic on February 11 was a good number (Rebecca & Henry Marschall).

At least one **Zone-tailed Hawk** continued in Monrovia through March 23, while others were in Glendale on February 11 (multiple observers) and over Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel on February 22 (Caleb Peterson).

A **Short-eared Owl** was in the Antelope Valley at Ave. B and 60th Street West on February 24 (Otto Mayer, Jodhan Fine, Omar Alui).

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers continued at Descanso Gardens in La Canada through February 12, at Veteran's Park in Sylmar through March 1 and on Santa Catalina Island through March 17. A Northern "**Yellow-shafted**"

Flicker at the Village Green Condominiums in Los Angeles on January 28 was the only confirmed pure bird of that subspecies (Don Sterba). Intergrades between “Red-shafted” and “Yellow-shafted” birds can be difficult to rule out.

A **Crested Caracara**, the second in two months, was at Alta Vicente Reserve in Rancho Palos Verdes on February 3 (Willie D’Anna). Aside from the oft encountered subspecies *columbarius*, a pale “**Prairie**” **Merlin** (*richardsonii*) was at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on February 16 (Naresh Satyan), while a “**Black**” **Merlin** (*suckleyi*) was at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood on February 10 (Joyce Brady).

Dusky-capped Flycatchers were at Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel from February 23-March 21 (Loren Wright) and at the Sepulveda Basin- returning for a third winter- on February 27 (Rebecca Marschall). An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** continued at Hansen Dam in Lake View Terrace through February 27, while a very rare **Brown-crested Flycatcher** continued near the South Coast Botanic Garden in Palos Verdes Estates through March 2.

Four continuing wintering **Tropical Kingbirds** were present during the period while the much less expected **Thick-billed Kingbird** was in Griffith Park through March 23.

A wintering **Hammond’s Flycatcher** continued at Tournament Park in Pasadena through March 6 and a Dusky Flycatcher continued at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena through March 12. **Western Flycatchers** were at Eaton Blanche Park in Pasadena through February 19, at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino on February 14 (m. obs.), at Murphy Ranch Park in Whittier on February 14 and at Biola University in La Mirada on February 26 (both Jonathan Rowley).

Wrapping up the flycatchers was an **Eastern Phoebe** continuing at San Dimas Canyon Park through February 16.

Again this year, a very early **Bell’s Vireo** was at Rio de Los Angeles Park in Los Angeles as of January 26 (Marcus England). Another wintering at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino was reported through February 21. Quite

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unusual in winter was a **Warbling Vireo** continuing in Claremont Village through January 30 (Michael San Miguel Jr.).

Following a significant gap in reports, the **Pacific Wren** at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena was observed again on March 15. Another was near Mt. Baldy Village on March 9 (Benjamin Ewing). Far rarer was the **Winter Wren** continuing at Castaic Lagoon through February 11.

The first **Purple Martin** of the spring was recorded at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on March 22 (Naresh Satyan).

Up to two **American Dippers** continued along the middle fork of the San Gabriel River near Mt. Baldy Village through March 15. This is now the only reliable location for this species in the county, though additional field work might turn up additional birds.

The **Brown Thrasher** at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood was recorded through March 17.

Two **Mountain Bluebirds** at Pt. Vicente on February 11 were unusual along the coast (Merryl Edelstein).

A **White Wagtail**, establishing just the sixth record for the county, was found along the Los Angeles River in Glendale on January 25 (Eric Johnson). It was not seen again until February 21 when high water pushed it up onto the embankment and again from March 7-25 farther upstream near Buena Vista Park.

A lingering **Lapland Longspur** continued at Griffith Park through February 3.

An unusual number of **Lark Buntings** included birds in the Antelope Valley at Ave. O and 10th Street West on February 21 (Luke Tiller), at Ave. B and 60th Street West on February 24 (Omar Alui, Otto Mayer, Jodhan Fine), at 256th Street West north of Highway 138 on February 27 (Josh McLaughlin) and at Sheldon Arleta Park in Sun Valley from February 29- March 17 (Rebecca Marschall). These above normal numbers in the county reflected a trend in the region this winter.

The status of **Sagebrush Sparrows** in the county is still being worked out. Two were confirmed at Saddleback Butte State Park in the Antelope Valley on January 14 (Max Breshears, Luca Cinus, Aashay Mody), with additional records being evaluated. This species is almost certainly more common than records would indicate, but at present, good photographic documentation is a requirement for our understanding of distribution to evolve.

Clay-colored Sparrows included a continuing bird in Silver Lake through March 22, one at Vina Vieja Park in Pasadena from February 3-March 16, one in Valencia on February 13 (both Luke Tiller), one at Rio de Los Angeles Park from March 5-15 (Caleb P.) and another continuing at El Dorado Park in Long Beach through March 10.

Dark-eyed “Gray-headed” Juncos were along Big Pines Highway on January 29 (Kimball Garrett), at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas from February 14-March 16 (Keith Condon) and continuing at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena through March 10. A **Dark-eyed “Pink-sided” Junco** continued at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas through March 11 and others were in Griffith Park on February 11 (John McCormack) and in Signal Hill from March 9-15 (Merryl Edelstein, Christine Jacobs).

Eight **Swamp Sparrows**, most of them continuing birds, were present during the period, while eight **Green-tailed Towhees** were reported in the county this winter.

Orchard Orioles were at Culver City Park on February 25 (Kevin Lapp), at Banning Park in Wilmington from February 29-March 18 (Chef Ito) and at La Mirada Community Park from March 7-12 (Jonathan Rowley).

A wintering **Hooded Oriole** continued at the Huntington Gardens in Pasadena through February 12, as did one in Rolling Hills through February 25. Two more, possibly early migrants, were in the Hollywood Hills from March 1-6 (Fernanda Ezabella).

A **Baltimore Oriole** was at Polytechnic High School in Sun Valley on March 3 (Teresa Palos) and a **Scott’s Oriole** was at Crystallaire from February 17-March 7 where one has spent past few winters (Ruth Gravance).

Rusty Blackbirds included one continuing at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera through February 18 and one at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB from February 16-March 18 (William Tyrer, Kimball Garrett).

Black-and-white Warblers, expected as a scarce migrant and winter visitor, were represented by seven individuals. A **Tennessee Warbler** was at Mountain View Park in El Monte on February 29 (Chef Ito) and one continued at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena through March 19.

The **American Redstart** at Oakdale Memorial Park in Glendora was reported through March 10. Very rare at any time was a Cape May Warbler continuing at Loyola Marymount University in Westchester through February 18. Another was at Alhambra Park from February 20-March 21 (Chef Ito). A **Northern Parula** was at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Palos Verdes Estates from March 12-20 (Manuel Duran, Alejandra Cedillo)

Chestnut-sided Warblers included a continuing bird at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena through March 9, one at Victory Park in

Pasadena from March 13-24 (David Bell), one at Washington Park in Pasadena on March 16 (Jon Feenstra) and one at Vina Vieja Park in Pasadena on March 19 (Luke Tiller).

About a half dozen **Palm Warblers** were present during the period. Less expected was a Pine Warbler at Satellite Park in Cerritos from February 29-March 1 (Thomas Lopez) and a **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel from February 22-March 20 (Chef Ito).


Painted Redstarts continued in Brentwood through March 22, at San Dimas Canyon Park through March 9 and in Arcadia through March 6. Another was at Lake Elizabeth on January 26 (Will B.)

Quite rare in the county was a wintering **Hepatic Tanager** continuing in Griffith Park through January 27 and another at Banning Park in Wilmington from March 2-25 (Mark Wilson, Van Pierszalowski).

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were in Altadena on March 6 (Carrie Sweredoski) and at the LA County Arboretum from March 20-21 (Lou & Chris Orr).

We're quickly rushing toward the peak of spring passerine migration in late April. Migrants will soon be everywhere. Both the coastal slope and the deserts can be very productive when conditions are right. Later in the season higher elevations will also see increasing activity.

Bear Divide near Santa Clarita rightfully has its devotees. An organized migrant census takes place each spring, a bird-banding operation is in place and there's the potential for large numbers of migrants. It's an excellent spot to observe the phenomenon of spring migration. The bonus of easy access and no walking required broadens its appeal further.

But there are many, many other places worth visiting in spring. With pleasant weather, lush green habitat beckoning and plenty of birds passing through, birders can be expected to maximize days in the field. No doubt a few unexpected birds will turn up among the numerous regular western migrants. 

BIRD WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS

UCLA North Campus

Friday, March 1, 2024

8:00 AM 9:30 AM

Kerckhoff Coffee House
308 Westwood Plaza
Los Angeles, CA, 90095

Join the Bruin Birding Club for a bird walk through UCLA's north campus. Birding usually extends to 9:30am, but you can join the group for as long as you're able to. You don't need any special equipment or ANY knowledge of birds—these walks are for everyone!

To Participate: The group will meet north of Kerckhoff Cafe at 8:00 am. Bruin Birding Club has a few pairs of binoculars we can loan out—first come, first serve! But remember that a lot of birding can be done by sound, so binoculars are not strictly necessary. For parking instructions, see here:

<https://transportation.ucla.edu/campus-parking/visitors>

Bruin Birding Club is the official Audubon student chapter at UCLA.

Open Wetlands at Ballona Salt Marsh

Saturday, March 2, 2024 & Sunday, March 10, 2024

Saturday, April 6, 2024 & Sunday, April 14, 2024

9:00 AM 12:00 PM

Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve

The first Saturday and 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. 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.

UCLA Sage Hill
Friday, March 8, 2024
8:00 AM 9:30 AM
Sage Hill
Los Angeles, CA, 90095

Join the Bruin Birding Club for a bird walk through UCLA's Sage Hill. Birding usually extends to 9:30am, but you can join the group for as long as you're able to. You don't need any special equipment or ANY knowledge of birds—these walks are for everyone!

To Participate: The group will meet at Sage Hill at 8:00 am. Bruin Birding Club has a few pairs of binoculars we can loan out—first come, first serve! But remember that a lot of birding can be done by sound, so binoculars are not strictly necessary.

Bruin Birding Club is the official Audubon student chapter at UCLA.

UCLA Botanical Garden
Friday, March 15, 2024
8:00 AM 9:30 AM
Mildred E. Mathias Botanical Garden
707 Tiverton Drive Los Angeles, CA, 90024

Join the Bruin Birding Club for a bird walk through the Mildred Mathias Botanical Garden. Birding usually extends to 9:30 am, but you can join the group for as long as you're able to. You don't need any special equipment or ANY knowledge of birds—these walks are for everyone!

To Participate: The group will meet at the La Kretz Garden Pavilion at 8:00 am. Here is a pin for the exact spot to meet. Bruin Birding Club has a few pairs of binoculars we can loan out—first come, first serve! But remember that a lot of birding can be done by sound, so binoculars are not strictly necessary. For parking instructions, see here: <https://www.botgard.ucla.edu/plan-your-visit/>

Bruin Birding Club is the official Audubon student chapter at UCLA.

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area Bird Walk (3rd Saturday)
Saturday, March 16, 2024 & Saturday, April 20, 2024
8:00 AM 12:00 PM
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area
4100 South La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90056

Leader: 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 (\$7.00 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.

Beginner's Bird Walk - Will Rogers State Historic Park **RSVP Required**

Sunday, March 17, 2024
8:00 AM 10:00 AM

Will Rogers State Historic Park
1501 Will Rogers State Park Road, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

RSVP Required, Limit 10

LOCATION: Will Rogers State Historic Park, 1501 Will Rogers State Park Road, Pacific Palisades, 90272

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.

UCLA North Campus
Friday, March 22, 2024
8:00 AM 9:30 AM

Kerckhoff Coffee House
308 Westwood Plaza, Los Angeles, CA, 90095

Join the Bruin Birding Club for a bird walk through UCLA's north campus. Birding usually extends to 9:30am, but you can join the group for as long as you're able to. You don't need any special equipment or ANY knowledge of birds—these walks are for everyone!

To Participate: The group will meet north of Kerckhoff Cafe at 8:00 am. Here is a pin for the exact spot to meet. Bruin Birding Club has a few pairs of binoculars we can loan out—first come, first serve! But remember that a lot of birding can be done by sound, so binoculars are not strictly necessary. For parking instructions, see here: <https://transportation.ucla.edu/campus-parking/visitors>

Bruin Birding Club is the official Audubon student chapter at UCLA.

Dancing Chicken Weekend Field Trip
****FULLY BOOKED WITH WAIT LIST****
April 26–28, 2024, Friday through Sunday

\$60 per person for the entire weekend
Limit of 12 participants, 8 cars allowed

Mary Freeman will be leading her 31st trip to watch the Greater Sage Grouse performing their ritual dance in Long Valley. We will have a Sage Grouse biologist present to tell us about the biology of these wonderful birds, on Friday evening. We will search for many of the eastern Sierra Nevada specialty birds the whole weekend including Rosy Finch, Juniper Titmouse, Pinyon Jay, Sooty Grouse and more.

For more information on how to register, call Susan at (323) 876-0202 (voice) or email susancastor@laaudubon.org



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WESTERN TANAGER

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

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Call for Applications — 2024 Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Awards

Los Angeles Audubon Society presents an annual research grant, the *Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Award*, to support research relevant to the biology of birds. Award recipients are limited to students and amateur ornithologists who are not able to secure research funding through channels available to professional ornithologists, and who reside in southern California (from San Luis Obispo, Kern and San Bernardino Counties south) or are currently enrolled in a southern California academic institution. There is no geographical restriction on the research area. While a more favorable consideration of research that is of a local nature involving local species and conservation issues, all researchers are encouraged to apply. Only one award will be given for an individual project or thesis.

One or more awards will be given out in 2024, with the maximum of \$2,000 per award. The application deadline for the 2024 Research Award is April 30, 2024, and it is anticipated that grants will be awarded in June 2024. In the past, grants were awarded for projects ranging from studies of urban parrots in Los Angeles to Emperor penguins in Antarctica.

Interested applicants can obtain further information regarding this award, and application materials, by downloading the materials from the Society's website: (laaudubon.org), or by contacting **Dr. Ryan Harrigan, Grants Committee Chairman, @ Institute of the Environment & Sustainability, University of California, Los Angeles, La Kretz Hall, Suite 300, Box 951496, Los Angeles, California, by email at: iluvsa@ucla.edu**. We look forward to receiving the always inspiring and exciting applications!

Dr. Schreiber was curator of birds and mammals at the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, known for his research on Pacific seabirds, including the impacts of the pesticide DDT on Brown Pelicans. Dr. Schreiber passed away during the prime of his career, and this award is meant to continue the spirit of research that he contributed to throughout his life.