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# WESTERN TANAGER





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## ON THE COVER



*White-tailed Tropicbirds are a rare and thrilling sighting off the cliffs at the St. Croix Avian Sanctuary. These birds can typically only be seen on pelagic trips far out at sea, but some nest on the cliffs of St. Croix. When landing, Tropicbirds must make numerous attempts before settling on the cliffs where they nest, as "their legs are far back on their bodies and don't allow them to perch."\** | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman. (Story on page 3)

\* A Fisherman's Guide to the US Virgins Islands: Seabirds;  
[https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/data/oceans/coris/library/NOAA/CRCP/project/10037/fi\\_sherman\\_guide\\_usvi\\_seabirds\\_english.pdf](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/data/oceans/coris/library/NOAA/CRCP/project/10037/fi_sherman_guide_usvi_seabirds_english.pdf)

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Island Hopping: Birding the U.S. Virgin Islands**, by  
Robbie Lisa Freeman

**Birds of the Season—August 2021**, by Jon Fisher

**OUTDOOR EDUCATION: What If We Had a Field Trip  
& Nobody Could Attend**, by Cindy Hardin

**INTERPRETING NATURE - June 2021: Baldwin Hills  
Greenhouse Program Research Projects, 2020–2021**,  
by Stacey Vigallon & Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program  
Interns

#### FROM OUR READERS:

Michael H. Lester, Long Live the Queen & The Circus  
is in Town  
Rose White, The Inception of My Grand Appreciation  
For All Things Natural  
Richard Knight, The Velocity Master  
Rachelle A. Arslan, The Los Angeles Cardinal  
Susan Lapham, We Have A Birdbath Outside Our Home



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

By Robbie Lisa Freeman

**T**he U.S. Virgin Islands – St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, and dozens of minor islands – serve as a fuel and rest stop for hundreds of thousands of birds traveling north and south over the Caribbean Sea during spring and winter migration. In all, more than 140 species of birds have been recorded in the coastal wetlands, mangrove forests and salt ponds, dry and moist forests, and along the rocky cliffs and coves, making the USVI worthy of a birding adventure. I headed there recently to learn about the challenges facing birds on these remote islands and to discover exciting new birds for my life list.

## Part 1: St. Croix — A Birding Sweet Spot

I'm standing in an 8' x 10' x 16' stout wooden box overlooking the semi-dry salt pond at the Southgate Coastal Reserve. From this newly constructed bird blind, I see hundreds of shore birds foraging through the mud flats and shallow waters. Countless more circle overhead, rising and falling in a perfectly synched aerial ballet.

"What draws them here?" I ask, crinkling my eyes in my binoculars as if that will help me see better. "Let me show you," says guide Jennifer Valiulis. "Follow me." Outside the bird blind she sets up her scope, futzes with it, then beckons me over. "Take a look." Her powerful scope reveals a world of surprises: the mud flats are moving! They're crawling with millions of tiny red fiddler crabs — the perfect hors d'oeuvres for the 100+ species of resident and migrant birds recorded around the area. We see sandpipers, soras, snipes, plovers, egrets, herons, terns, and yellowlegs, to name a few. And this

is the end of migration season! "Many of these shore birds will head north soon," says Valiulis, "but others, like the Least Terns, are just arriving. During rainy season, when the pond fills, we get totally different birds — lots of ducks. We've had flamingos. Last year we had the first record of a Scarlet Ibis — two adults plus a hybrid." The ibises, typically found farther south where they're lauded as the national bird of Trinidad and Tobago, had likely wandered off course. Fortunately for both wandering and migrating birds, a preserve like Southgate can be a life-saving oasis in a long journey.

The 100-acre Southgate Coastal Reserve is a critical wetlands ecosystem for sheltering and nourishing birds. It includes a coastal salt pond, upland grasses, and mangrove and beach forests. According to Valiulis, who is executive director at St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA), the preserve not only supports threatened and endangered bird species, but it provides a beach berm for three species of imperiled sea turtles, and habitat for the endangered St. Croix Agave. She



From inside the new Southgate Coastal Reserve bird blind, birders can observe hundreds of birds foraging. Wilson's Plovers are among those in serious decline, due to ground nesting, which makes them vulnerable to cats, mongoose, and flooding. Other visitors include Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, sandpipers and egrets. | Photo courtesy of Jennifer Valiulis.



Greater Yellowlegs migrate from the southern tip of South America to as far north as Massachusetts on the East coast or British Columbia on the West coast. The bill of this bird is roughly 1.5 times the length of its head, distinguishing it from the oft-confusing Lesser Yellowlegs with its smaller, straighter beak. Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.

shows us a recently planted specimen. “This agave is only found on St. Croix, but became rare in the wild due to habitat destruction and collection by specimen seekers,” she says. Today, SEA works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and other associations to designate critical habitat for it.

Valiulis shows us other native plants and trees SEA has planted, such as the caper tree, and orange manjack. Replanting native habitat has been critical to forest and wetland birds. “After Hurricane Maria struck in 2017, this whole area was carved out; complete destruction of plants and trees,” she says. The Category 5 hurricane was the region’s worst in recorded history. But after four years of recovery there are bright spots. “This bush, Sweet Scent, popped up after the hurricane,” she says. “We like it because it’s native, and these small clusters form flowers that attract both birds and bees.” As if on cue, we hear a melodious song and look up: A Yellow Warbler sits high in a shrub. He delights us with few more notes before disappearing in a golden flash.

As we trek on, Valiulis describes the goals of SEA: education, conservation, and advocacy. SEA conducts school field trips, classroom lectures, community events, and even kids’ camps to help families learn about island wildlife and conservation. “One of my favorite activities is free snorkel clinics for families,” she says. “Many islanders have never snorkeled. Once they see fish, sea turtles, and coral under water, it can be life-changing.” Having

experienced first-hand a sea turtle encounter here, I whole-heartedly agree.

But for now, with our feet on dry land, I’m hoping for an encounter of a different sort: “Ever get Mangrove Cuckoos here?” I ask. “We don’t see a lot of those,” Jen admits. I’m crestfallen, but not for long. Minutes later I see motion in the corner of my eye — a bird tucked into a scrubby bush. When he pops out, I whisper loudly, “Mangrove Cuckoo!” He’s just feet from us, so we stand frozen, holding our breaths, hoping he might thread his way into the open. And ... ever... sooo.... slowly.... he does, popping his head out clasp nesting materials in his beak. When he’s suddenly joined by a second cuckoo, Jen gasps. “They’re usually solitary, so to see two together is rare,” she says. “This might be a first record of them nesting here!” That’s an impressive morning discovery and an encouraging sign that SEA’s conservation efforts may be paying off — providing new safe havens for birds of all types.

A day later I drive to another avian sweet spot, St. George Village Botanical Gardens. These gardens were once part of a 150-acre sugar plantation. But when sugar profits soured, cattle replaced the cane. In 1972, a 16-parcel of land was donated to the St. Croix Garden Club to establish a village garden. Today, the remarkably transformed site is known for its vast botanical collection of over 1,000 rare and native plants. Arriving at 7 AM, I’m excited to see what birds inhabit this little oasis. From the parking lot, I immediately spy not one but two American Kestrels in the tall trees. Through my



*The secretive Mangrove Cuckoo is a prize to see anywhere. Distinguished by a black ear patch, decurved beak, buff-colored abdomen, and long gray and white tail, it is most commonly found in dry tropical forests. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*Writer Robbie Lisa Freeman (l.) and SEA Executive Director Jennifer Valiulis, pause in front of the new Southgate Coastal Reserve Bird Blind. Valiulis originally became a conservation steward to help save local Hawksbill, Leatherback, and Green Sea Turtles for future generations. Learn more about the St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA) at [www.stxenvironmental.org](http://www.stxenvironmental.org). | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



binoculars I can see that they're bent over breakfast – likely a mouse or lizard, judging by the long limp tail. Below the birds, in the tall grass I see movement, then the head of giant green iguana, one of the world's largest land lizards. He pauses, then bolts like lightening through the scrub. Thoughts of Jurassic Park come to mind.

In the garden's reception area, I'm met by a tall crucian man — made taller by his turban headwrap. The esteemed Olasee Davis is a man who wears many hats, both literally and figuratively. By trade, the native Virgin Islander is a Professor in the Natural Resources Program at the Cooperative Extension for the University of the Virgin Islands. He's also an activist, ecologist, botanist, historian, teacher, writer, and bushman who has spent a lifetime educating locals, visitors, students and politicians about St. Croix's cultural history and environmental preservation.

"Preservation does not happen on its own," says Davis, who helped pave the way to protect what is now St. Croix's East End Nature Preserve. "Our beautiful places require vigilance. Those of us who fought for the preserve worked many years to make that happen." Davis conducted hundreds of tours to educate residents and testified at dozens of public hearings to fend off development. After winning that conservation battle, he helped establish the St. Croix East End Marine Park, and was a central force in making Point Udall accessible, "so that every person, even those with disabilities, could enjoy the site," Davis says.

As we stroll the gardens, Davis points out the native and rare plant species that help to sustain bird life. He's seen over a hundred bird species here through the years. At the

pond area, herons and ducks find shelter. Near the cactus garden, Green-throated and Antillean Crested Hummingbirds joust for territory. In the trees, Pearly-eyed Thrashers and Bananaquits banter. The raspy sound of the Bananaquit, the official bird of the U.S. Virgin Islands, was once one of the most prolific calls on the island, but as sugar cane disappeared so did many of the "sugar birds." Bird protections are a concern for Davis, who's seen two of his favorites, the Scaly-naped and White-crowned Pigeons, seriously diminish in number.

"More than 100 years ago, thousands of White-crowned Pigeons nested on nearby Green Cay, but hunters and egg poachers destroyed the colonies," says Davis. Today, researchers rally to protect the remaining breeding sites, such as Ruth Island, and advocate for restoration of nesting and foraging areas in wetlands and woodlands on St. Croix. "Are you hopeful?" I ask. "We must have hope," says Davis. "Without nature and a healthy environment, human life is not sustainable. We must better manage the resources we have."

Fortunately, St. Croix is doing many things right. In addition to the Southgate reserve, St. George gardens, and the East End Nature Preserve and Marine Park, the 84-square mile island is home to Sandy Point Wildlife Refuge, Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge, Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve, Buck Island Reef National Monument, The Nature Conservancy's Estate Little Princess preserve, and 33 territorially owned offshore cays that have been designated as wildlife sanctuaries to protect nesting habitat for generations to come. And while these preserves provide plenty of birding hot spots, I find lifers in the most unexpected places.



Once common on St. Croix, the Bananaquit, or "sugar bird," has diminished in number with the disappearance of sugar cane plantations. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman



Professor Davis explains the importance of diverse plant life on the island. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman.



*Endemic to the islands of the Eastern Caribbean, the Green-throated Carib has expanded to the Virgin Islands and is easy to spot with its decurved beak and iridescent green plumage. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*



*The near-threatened White-crowned Pigeon is found primarily on the Caribbean Islands and in southern Florida. Once prolific, they were even admired by John James Audubon, who painted them for his book, Birds of America. Today their populations continue to decline due to overhunting and habitat loss. | Photo courtesy of Randy Freeman.*

Walking onto my beachfront deck the first morning in Frederiksted, I spied a White-crowned Pigeon. Snorkeling for turtles in Frederiksted Bay, I saw Laughing Gulls perched on a piling. Strolling the harbor boardwalk in Christiansted, I stumbled upon a Little Blue Heron, fishing just feet in front of me. And stopping by a golf course pond, I glimpsed Common Gallinules and White-Cheeked Pintails. No matter where you bird, boat, hike, stroll or swim on St. Croix, you're likely to run into a lifer. It's just one of the many sweet treats of visiting this former sugar cane island. 🐦



*The aptly named Laughing Gull has a raucous call that does indeed sound just like he's laughing. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman.*



*On the boardwalk at the harbor in Christiansted, this Little Blue Heron politely let me observe his hunting techniques as he dove for small fish. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman.*



## The St. Croix Avian Sanctuary

**T**he St. Croix Avian Sanctuary is the only bird rescue of its type in the entire U.S. Virgin Islands. Since its establishment in the early 1980s, owner Toni Lance has rehabilitated more than 700 birds who've been injured in hurricanes, hit by cars, or otherwise harmed. Located on a clifftop parcel of land, the Sanctuary affords sweeping views of the Caribbean Sea. The property consists of a trim yellow house, surrounded by aviaries of varying sizes, occupied by recuperating hawks, doves, and other birds. Outbuildings house freezers of food – frozen fish, rats, mice, lizards – most anything meaty that might appeal to a raptor on the mend. Sacks of seed nourish birds of a different feather.

On an early morning visit, I'm surprised to be greeted by Sandy, a brilliant white Cattle Egret and survivor of its namesake, Hurricane Sandy. Released to the wild after recovery at the sanctuary, the egret seldom wanders far. Nearby, an American Kestrel perches on a wire above the road, another bird brought back from the brink of death. The stories of bird rehabilitation here are small miracles really. Especially considering that Lance began this journey with no special training. In College, she studied medical illustration and human anatomy. But her love of birds led her to natural history museums, where she could check out, study, and draw bird skins. She even taught herself taxidermy to better understand bird anatomy. Through the years, she transformed that knowledge into photorealistic avian art, launching a career as a much-lauded artist. On a parallel course, her passion for birds drove her to rescue those she found injured around St. Croix.

As word of Lance's rescues spread, locals began dropping off sick or injured birds. "There weren't a lot of options for people who wanted to save birds," Lance says. "They couldn't afford to pay vets to rehab them." She sought advice from national rescue associations, but they were unhelpful. Strict laws govern wildlife rescue and Lance was not licensed to provide care. Finally, with the encouragement of St. Croix Fish and Wildlife, Lance obtained a Department of Natural Resources Rehabilitation License, taking classes and seminars on bird hydration, fluids, feeding, nutrition, and diseases. Her training ushered her into an intimate and rewarding life with birds: rescuing, rehabilitating, releasing them — and painting them. Not surprisingly many of her patients are the subjects of her artwork.

Today I get to meet some of those patients. Near the house, a Peregrine Falcon perches on a post, catching the morning sun. Sidelined from the skies by a wing injury, he nonetheless looks fierce and proud. When Lance approaches him, he allows her to lift him, then he stretches and flaps his wings, as if mentally envisioning the day he will be strong enough to fly free again.

Not far off, a large enclosure houses two pelicans, both recovering from wing injuries. "They were lucky that the large bones weren't broken," Lance says, "because that is a death sentence." In her early years, Lance tried and failed to rescue birds with broken wings. Today, she's more pragmatic. Often consulting with a local vet, she makes sure her charges have the opportunity for a full recovery and return to the wild.

In another large aviary, White-crowned and Scaly-naped Pigeons are recuperating. She brings out the Scaly-naped Pigeon, which perches on her finger then flies to a branch. She coaxes him down, and he hops to her head, then her hand. The trust between them is evident. Whether recuperating in an enclosure or flying free over surrounding fields, Lance's birds feel safe at this St. Croix Sanctuary.



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

*Each year, bird rehabilitator Toni Lance takes in about 30 birds like this Peregrine Falcon. For every bird she rescues that goes on to breed, Lance figures she's helped to sustain new generations of birds. That's a legacy to be proud of. For more information, visit [tonilance.com](http://tonilance.com). | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman.*

# INTERPRETING NATURE

*The Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program Research Projects, 2020-2021 school year*

*By Stacey Vigallon and Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program Interns*



*At-home nature observations made by students in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program uploaded to the program's iNaturalist project.*

*On May 18th, 2021 the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program wrapped up its 13th school year. The challenges of the pandemic required us to conduct the program entirely through online Zoom sessions. We focused on spectacularly local nature, with students observing and documenting what they could find in their apartment complexes, backyards, and neighborhoods. We also looked at the big picture, examining community-based problem-solving, multidisciplinary collaboration, and psychological barriers to sustainable choices. Students submitted highlights from their phenology journals and at-home plant germination experiments to the Los Angeles Public Library's Covid-19 Public Archive, ensuring that nature is represented in the historical record of our city's pandemic experience. The annual Cactus Commencement Ceremony -the culminating event where students formally present their work to an audience – was also conducted on Zoom to an audience of peers, program alumni, program supporters, and students from Cal Poly Pomona's Questad Lab.*

*Greenhouse interns were incredibly committed to seeing their projects to completion. As they do each year in the program, interns collectively invested hundreds of hours in the research process: crafting a proposal, collecting and analyzing data, and designing a research poster. Each year, we publish their research project abstracts in an effort to share the knowledge gained with a broader audience and to acknowledge the interns' hard work and commitment. This year's projects asked interesting questions about sustainability practices, variation in urban tree canopy cover, indigenous land stewardship practices, the future of Ballona Creek, and how people connect to nature.*

## **Brandon Kim**

*Examining the Human-Nature Relationship Through a Literary Magazine*

Human modification of the environment has led to a significant human-nature disconnect. Between 2018-2020, I investigated this complex relationship by administering a series of writing prompts to students in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program asking about their nature experiences. Between 2019-2020, I constructed a theme code and conducted a thematic analysis of the student-written samples collected in that span. Significant trends that emerged from these samples included the calming and introspective effect of nature; a perception of nature as being both an "escape" from urban life and an adventurous,

exciting space; and frequent mention of location, plants and animals. These results may help manage urban-induced stress and indicate which aspects of nature are most valued, aiding conservation efforts. Between 2020-2021, I designed a literary magazine compiling selected samples. This structure allowed these samples to be better appreciated as "literature," facilitating author-reader dialogue and understanding of the author's relationship with nature. It also presented the human-nature relationship as a "conversation," a construct that emphasizes nature as a living being to be grateful for. These findings highlight literature as a promising tool in environmental science communication, especially considering its emphasis on gratitude; individuals who are grateful for nature will likely value conservation.



## *Gastronomical and Medicinal Plants at Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook*

Greenhouse Program. The analysis suggested the following trends: as the average tree canopy cover increased in a zip code, the emergency visits for asthma and its related issues per 10,000 people, the rate of adults without a high school diploma, and the unemployment rate decreased. Although I was working with a relatively small sample size of 15 zip codes, indicators of wealth in a community had a positive relationship with tree canopy cover. For future research, I hope others can continue examining this data set, perhaps looking at factors like ethnic/racial makeup, age, and population density of each zip code.



**Yusuf Maung**

My project is a reptile awareness campaign that is meant to reduce the fear and panic people have when they encounter reptiles at Baldwin Hills parklands. Many people fear reptiles and overreact when they come into contact with them, which can lead to potentially endangering the reptiles. First, I surveyed Greenhouse Program students and staff about their attitudes and their family members' attitudes towards reptiles. The data revealed that the family members were typically more scared of reptiles and that they had less knowledge about reptiles, compared to Greenhouse students and staff themselves. This supports my theory that people's fear of reptiles is

often caused by the lack of knowledge they have of them. The data set from my survey was then used to inform a social media campaign where I focused on 3 specific reptiles that can be found at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook in an attempt to spread knowledge about reptiles. My project's findings can be used by future Greenhouse interns who are interested in studying the relationship between humans and reptiles/nature.

## Everyone on the Trails

**Joseph McCullough**

The wealth of a community can be represented by its amount of and accessibility to green spaces, especially in areas requiring additional resources to maintain vegetation in drought-prone environments. In Los Angeles, the disparity in the amount of accessible green spaces has more complex issues than the ones seen at surface level. Using online mapping tools, I organized and examined several socioeconomic indicators of wealth, health, pollution,, and education, alongside green space coverage of trees, shrubs, grass and other pavements. The focal areas were determined by the residential zip codes of students in the



A botanical illustration from Intern Akari's Herbarium of the Baldwin Hills

there pertaining to people not staying on the trail. For the final stage of my project I used my results to work with others to create a collective social media strategy that gave us a timeline for how we wanted to launch our campaigns.

#### **Akari Johnston**

##### *Cyanotype and Illustrated Herbarium of Baldwin Hills*

Using last year's project, a sun print herbarium containing common native and non-native plants at Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook State Park, as a jumping off point, this year I used digital art to create detailed illustrations of the plants in the herbarium. The illustrations were created in a similar format to botanical illustrations that are meant for plant identification and are used by botanists in scientific studies. In conjunction with Abril Sernas-Hernandez's project, we will create an informative piece of media that combines my digital botanical artwork with the information that she compiled about each plant. The goal is to help the public to learn how to identify plants and the uses of plants seen at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, which spreads awareness of the various local species as well as the differences between native and non-native plant species. As this is my last year, I cannot continue my project, but I hope future interns will be able to use it as a resource.

#### **Isabella Garcia & Kiana Roman**

##### *Sustainable Habits Knowledge*

The Baldwin Hills area plays a valuable role for the local environment and the local community. The increased urbanization around the Baldwin Hills area has led to a lack of diversity and isolation of many plants and animals, as well as an increase in human interaction with the remaining animals and plants. Many people visit Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook (BHSO) for outdoor recreation. There has also been an increase in trash at BHSO. Trash could be reduced if

park visitors practice sustainability habits while at the park. Our research project aims to understand and educate the local community about sustainability habits to practice in green spaces. To find out what type of sustainability information to share, we needed to survey park visitors to find out their current knowledge and beliefs. We surveyed Greenhouse Program students. The data illustrated that many students had limited knowledge of sustainability practices, but that they did apply them when they visited green spaces. Many participants believed that it was the individual's responsibility to manage litter at the park. This data set will inform the development of content to encourage park visitors to practice sustainability practices. Content will be distributed via Greenhouse Program affiliated social media.

#### **Azul Calderon**

##### *Spanglish Ecology of the Baldwin Hills*

My project is producing an educational podcast, The Spanglish Ecology of Baldwin Hills. I will address Baldwin Hills' ecology in order to educate the public about how diverse the land is, while teaching them new Spanish words relating to ecology. I first had to learn about ecology and find out which intern projects best fit my narrative. By interviewing 4 of my fellow interns, I was able to find out what makes Baldwin Hills unique, gain other students' perspectives on ecology, and find out what made them so interested in the area. In order to record the interviews I used a Sony model #ICD/UX560 microphone, and I am using the Audacity software to edit the podcasts. All 4 interviews had a common theme: when we educate the public about the environment, people better understand the situation and may be more willing to take action. I engaged two Restoration Leaders as collaborators, commissioning them to compose an original score. I am creating four 2-3 minute episodes centered on the following words: fenología(phenology), botánica (botany), curiosidad (curiosity), restauración del habitat (habitat restoration).

#### **Sienna Koizumi**

##### *Activist Art with Yarn Made Out of Plastic Bags*

My intern project is an octopus cape crocheted using 'plarn,' or yarn made out of plastic bags. It is the culmination of two years dedicated to this material. Plastic is a threat to nature, both because of its contributions to global warming and as a pollutant. Concern over plastic waste is largely relieved by the belief that it gets recycled, but that is a myth manufactured by plastic manufacturers - most plastic does not get recycled for economical and practical reasons. Therefore, plastic bags were chosen as the material for my project. Reusing them will actually prevent plastic from entering landfills, and spread awareness in an artistic way. Octopuses were the inspiration for the cape because they can symbolize stranglers, which plastics are. Once finished, the cape can be used in the Greenhouse Program to introduce the topic of plastic pollution, and the



tentacles can be animated to use for a performance. While working on the project, I learned about and was inspired by others who used art in their activism, like ‘craftivists’ who used crafting in order to advocate for change. Using crochet was significant for me because it is very hands-on, and proves that art can be used in combination with science to help tackle complex problems like plastic waste.

### Denny Lorenzano

#### *The Ecology of My Apartment*

My project revolves around my apartment complex and the nature within it. I created my own Nature Journal, in which I kept a log of hand-picked plants in my apartment and sketched them. I made a map that showed an overhead view of my apartment to figure out which stations I would visit. I chose a total of three stations. Before starting the sketches, I identified which plants I was sketching. With the help of iNaturalist, a free mobile app, I could take a picture of my plant and it would find the best match for which plant species it was. For each station, I would take a sheet of printer paper and create a realistic sketch of the plant. I added notes on the side of my sketch, which consisted of what I noticed in my surroundings that day and anything that I thought I would want to remember for the next day, like observed changes, questions I had, or any insects I saw. After I was done, I would move on to the next station, repeating my actions. Being able to do this project was fun, and definitely helped my well-being. I feel that everyone should have some outdoor time, especially during the pandemic, when we’re all stuck at home. I feel that I’ve gained better observational skills, learned what kind of wildlife lives in my own apartment, and take better care of vegetation in our own home. I created a Nature Journal Guide for those who would like to try out this activity.

At-home nature observations made by students in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program uploaded to the program’s iNaturalist project. At-home nature observations made by

students in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program uploaded to the program’s iNaturalist project.

### Nia Yick

#### *Greenhouse Cookbook*

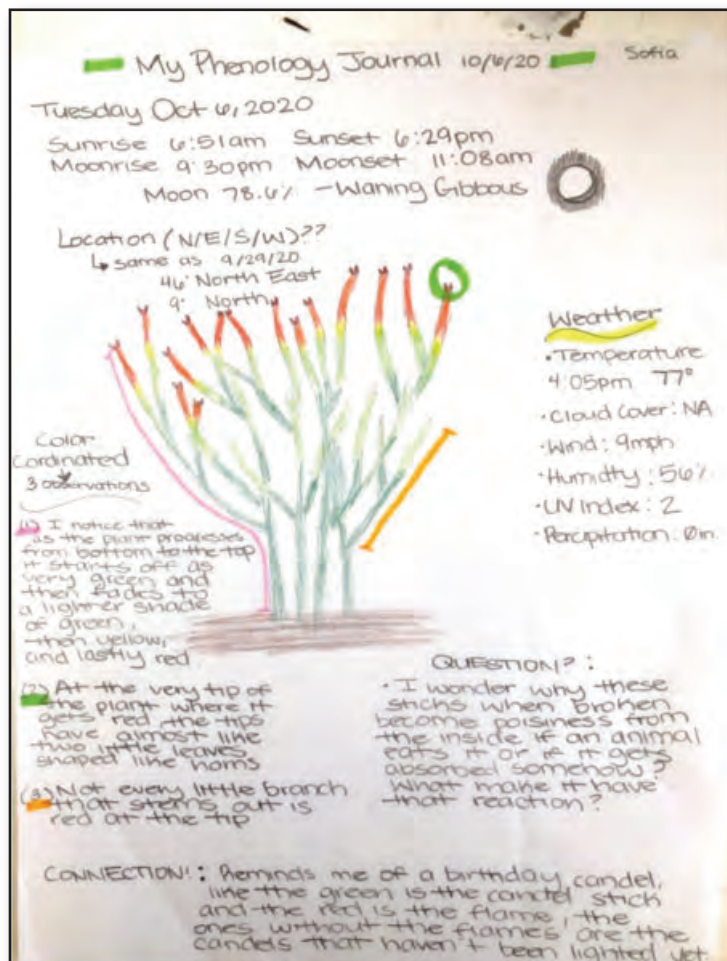
Food is something that connects all humans. Through studying the history of food and the relationship different cultures have with food, we can “map who we are, where we come from, and what happened to us along the way” (Choi 2014). I studied Greenhouse Program staff and students to better understand how food plays a role in their social and cultural relationships. I collected data about food habits through a Google Forms survey, while more in-depth questions about relationships and culture were asked during small group interviews. My qualitative data set indicates food does play a role in building connections between people. Meals give people an opportunity to gather and talk about their life; people bond over liking/disliking certain foods; and conversations about the history of a food engage different generations. Food ties participants directly to childhood memories, as many interviewees responded that certain foods reminded them of what their grandparents made them. The results from my project can help future program planning, perhaps incorporating more food activities with a variety of foods to allow students to bond.

Future research could focus on how food is available depending on where someone might live or their cultural background.

### Nosheen Maung

#### *Mutual Aid*

As my project takes place amidst the impacts of Covid-19 during the 2020-2021 school year, I wanted this project to serve as direct support for my community. Discovering the concept and practice of mutual aid, a self-sufficient system where everyone benefits and helps out, the sustainability and community-oriented center of mutual aid fit my intentions seamlessly. It stands to be more permanent compared to aid in the form of events, ie. a food drive. In researching the topic, the question of the possibility of implementing this in my



Greenhouse students kept phenology journals to document at-home nature.

immediate community began to drive my project. To work towards an answer, I narrowed down my range to Greenhouse Program students and designed a survey to identify what form of aid would be most of interest to the Greenhouse Program students. The survey data allowed me to establish a framework for a self-sufficient mutual aid model for the Greenhouse Program, providing aid in the form of what the majority was most interested in: college help/help with school subjects, socializing, and plant knowledge. This project can be further developed with the focus being the design of the mutual aid system, its implementation, and study of its effectiveness.

### Jonathan Kim

#### *Examining Students' Beliefs on Environmental Impacts of Restoration of the Ballona Creek*

Urbanization of the local Ballona Creek and watershed has resulted in the damage to much of the existing habitat. Despite this, the remaining underlying watershed processes leave restoration as a viable option. I have endeavored in a multi-year research project exploring this idea of restoration of the Ballona Creek and hypothesized that restoration would positively affect the environment. As an initial step, I conducted a survey that would help me understand Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program students' knowledge on the historical and current state of Ballona Creek, as well as their beliefs on what the environmental impacts of restoration of the creek would be. I analyzed both the quantitative and qualitative data, which was evaluated through determining common word or phrase trends for the written responses. The results will aid me in the future as I plan to create a model next year comparing students' knowledge on the effects of restoring Ballona Creek versus the actual environmental impacts of restoration. This comparison will not only help me examine my larger hypothesis, but also allow me to determine whether Greenhouse students are generally informed on this important issue of restoration of the Ballona Creek.

### Cindy Chavez Gonzalez

#### *Cultural Burning*

Not many people have heard of cultural burning before, but it's a necessity for our land. Cultural burning is beneficial for plants, people, and animals. Cultural burning is not just setting plants on fire randomly, it happens on a small area of chosen land and it is kept under control. The plants then can be used to make material and even medicine. When cultural burning is limited, the chances of intense wildfires that spread across the mountains increases tremendously and may even end up burning down homes. It would be good to spread awareness about how cultural burning can really help us and lessen our chances of having wildfires similar to the ones we had in 2020. Especially with global warming getting worse, we should be considering what other options we have. I wanted to share the information with Greenhouse students and assess their level of knowledge about wildfires. I gave a pre-survey, presented a video, and then gave a post-survey. I compared the answers to see if anyone's opinions or knowledge changed after watching the video. More students came out with the knowledge that not all wildfires are bad, which is exactly what the project was supposed to do.

### John Recendez

#### *Next Steps for a Greenhouse Business Plan*

My long-term project is a business plan that involves selling native plants to the community with the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program. The purpose behind this project is to benefit the community around the area, as well as the environment, specifically the native fauna through the creation of "rest stops" for animals who rely on native plants. The community would also benefit from having native plants in their homes. The project's purpose to inform rather than advertise was a result of studies done during my second year connecting my project to climate change and urbanization. The majority of my time this year was spent doing research and developing interview protocols for industry professionals to implement next year. The main issues I faced involved trying to integrate certain ideas into my project that I learned about, and trying to deal with technicalities regarding taxes and profits. These issues helped me learn more about how to plan out the future of my project. The next steps in my project are to finalize everything and begin the setup after ironing out a few issues involving feedback from professionals.



At-home nature observations made by students in the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program uploaded to the program's iNaturalist project.



# WHAT IF WE HAD A FIELD TRIP AND NOBODY COULD ATTEND?

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

As we know all too well, the pandemic events of the last year and a half have caused myriad activities to be curtailed or cancelled altogether. Our formerly robust field trip programs actually saw mass cancellations even before the schools closed in March, 2020.

Obviously, all school children have been profoundly affected by school closures, and close to 3,000 students saw the loss of the opportunity to explore Ballona and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area under the guidance of our fabulous trained Naturalists. On a personal level, I had to teach myself to deliver nature programming online. This remote learning approach turned out to be more successful than I had hoped, and enabled me to keep in touch and partnered with many of the fabulous teachers that we see every year. Electronic learning also kept me in a job!

But we also have a group of around 30 volunteers that work to create positive nature experiences for the children of Los Angeles through “real life” trips in nature. I had concerns that with so much time off, the fervor and dedication these folks give to our programs might diminish. Happily, my fears were unfounded!

Most notably, our own Dorothy Steinicke developed an on-

line Nature Journaling course that we presented to two different schools, along with the help of volunteers Martine Tomczyk and Joyce Karel. We met weekly over an eight week period with students, with great results, first at Walnut Park Middle School and then with 186th Elementary School. In fact, one of our partner teachers in the project is planning on duplicating the course for her class during the 2021-2022 school year! You might have read about this endeavor in a previous issue of the Western Tanager.

Throughout the last year and a half I have kept in touch with our docent crew via email updates, and a recurring theme amongst the crowd was how much they missed the work and seeing each other. I could not have agreed more. By April, as things were starting to improve with the international health crisis, I decided that it would be possible to gather outside once again as small groups in the great outdoors. The positive response warmed my heart!

Our first foray was a trip to my beloved Bolsa Chica Wetlands. I chose this spot because the wide trails allow for proper social distancing, and Spring Migration time allows the chance to see lots of birds and a huge diversity of species. It was a huge success, and a wonderful feeling to see everyone after such a long hiatus.



*Our gracious and fascinating host, Robert “Bob” Ramirez, and the very impressive ki’iy at Kuruvungna.*



*The Kuruvunga Springs.*





*Red Flame Skimmer hanging out with us at Kuruvungna Springs.*

Encouraged by the positive response, another trip was organized in May, this time to Franklin Canyon. We again had an impressive turnout of volunteers, and the canyon was just lovely. Highlights of the day: a young Gopher Snake and the native Western Pond Turtle.

By now I was emboldened! Every June we celebrate the end of a busy school year with a Docent Thank You Luncheon. This is a chance for everyone to relax, share some good food and revel in another successful year of creating excitement and awareness of nature for our budding young naturalists. Even though there were no field trip successes to celebrate, I wanted to celebrate the mere fact that we were still engaged and together as a group in spite of all the challenges. So, in June I hosted a scaled down version of this event on the patio of my home. All attendees were vaccinated (we have a smart crowd, as you know!), and we had our own outdoor dining experience, similar to what most of our local restaurants have been doing to survive!

It was clear that the desire to stay engaged and to continue learning was high amongst the crowd, so it was decided that a July get together should be planned as well. This was a really special excursion—we all met on July 21st at Kuruvungna Springs, which are on the grounds of University High in West Los Angeles. This ancient spring, used for thousands of years by our local tribe, the Tongva (or Gabrielinos), continues to flow with waters held by

the Santa Monica Mountains. We were treated to a fabulous tour by our guide, Robert Ramirez, who taught us about the Springs, the restoration work being done there with increased planting of native flora, and the farming area that features New World Crops, especially the “Three Sisters” of corn, beans and squash.

I had never been to the Springs, as their public Open House conflicts with our monthly Open Wetlands at Ballona. Both occur on the first Saturday of the month. But for those of you who do have that day free, I highly recommend a visit. The Springs are open the first Saturday of the month from 9 am to 3 pm, and are located at 141 South Barrington in West LA. Do take the time to make a visit, and please tell Bob that “Cindy sent you”.

Open Wetlands was another casualty of the pandemic, but as things started looking up, we returned to staging this very popular event in July, albeit in a slightly different format. Normally Open Wetlands is done on a drop-in basis, and guests are free to come by and stay for as little or long a time as they want. For our maiden return we operated on a scheduled basis, with small, socially distanced groups going out hourly. But even with this limited approach, we had 51 attendees. The desire to be outside is strong amongst the general public!

Open Wetlands usually goes dark in August, due to high temperatures and the fact that so many folks take this time of year to



*A rattlesnake youngster was a special treat to see at Franklin Canyon.*





*Franklin Canyon - an oasis of wilderness surrounded by Beverly Hills.*

vacation. However, the momentum was building amongst our group, and we saw August as a perfect opportunity to make that first Saturday a docent day! The event was open to docents, friends and family, and once again, many of our group gathered to be together in nature. Special treat: a bird walk led by expert and encouraging birder Walter Lamb, and we were rewarded by seeing some notable species, including a Wilson's Phalarope bobbing on the creek, and a White Shouldered Kite perched in a snag.

At the end of the morning, we had a brief meeting about what things will look like for our programs going forward. At this time of year I am usually in the midst of planning multi-week training programs at both Kenneth Hahn and Ballona. And by September we are usually almost entirely booked with field trips for the coming school year. That is not the case this year. Although school is now back in session, at this point, our usual constituency, children under 12 years old, are not eligible for vaccination. There is still a lot of desire to participate in our programs from local educators, but in the interest of caution, we are holding off on booking trips on a regular basis. Due to this uncertainty, our docent training will be more casual for the

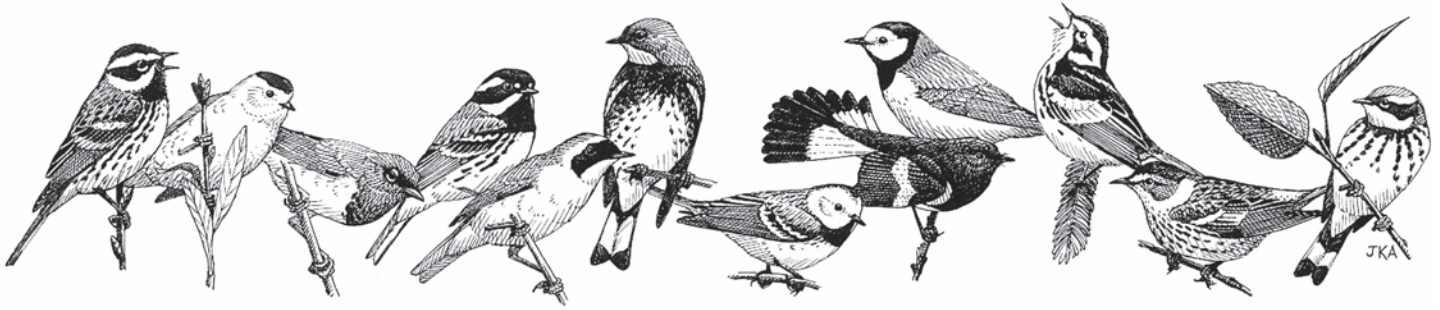
Fall. I will be planning monthly Docent Enrichment Programs going forward. This might be an on-site lecture, or a field trip to one of our local nature spots. Since we are lucky enough to live in a place that is full of natural beauty and dedicated nature educators, the possibilities are many. And in this way we can continue to expand our knowledge and sharpen our skills as we wait for the green light to get back to what we really love-working with the kids!

The real takeaway of all that I have described is the fact that our group has the good fortune to be composed of a truly wonderful roster of environmental educators. Their desire to stay engaged and remain a part of what we do to inspire interest and understanding of the natural world far surpassed my expectations. I am beyond grateful to have a job that allows me to work with such wonderful people, who refuse to give up on our mission!

It has also been announced that the education wing of Los Angeles Audubon has been folded into a brand new non-profit, the Nature Nexus Institute. We are excited about this development! In establishing a new organization completely devoted to education and access to nature for all people and all age groups, we will be able to continue the very successful programs that have been under the umbrella of LA Audubon for all these years, and expand our reach to even more residents of our region. There is also talk of our own newsletter, so that means you will soon have two sources to keep you updated on all things wild in Los Angeles. I can hardly contain my excitement with thoughts of both new adventures and a return to doing the things that have made our group so special over the last two decades. I will be sure to keep you posted! 🕊️



*Docent Crew at Ballona*



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

While heat baked the Los Angeles County deserts, summer on the coastal slope was more mild than intense. Fire season- at least in Los Angeles County- has been subdued this summer. Experience tells us that neither of those conditions are likely to persist, but good fortune may smile upon us.

Most of the western United States continues to endure severe or extreme drought and ever-lengthening and increasingly destructive fire seasons. While birds are very adaptable, their ability has its limits. Drought and fire is certainly affecting not only local resident and summering birds, but the migrants that pass through our area and those that spend the winter.

The effects of last summer's Bobcat Fire linger, with a number of favored birding spots still closed to public access. A year later, a drive through the fire area is still unsettling. Large areas of habitat have been lost to both the Station Fire of 2009 and the 2020 Bobcat Fire, and to a number of smaller blazes. The result is that much of the San Gabriel Mountains have been transformed into new habitats and a new landscape.

Following the very early Wilson's Phalaropes, various southbound shorebirds began moving through in July. Numbers increased noticeably through August. A very few fall migrant passerines also appeared in July, but it was August before these became obvious.

While its lower portions are renowned for great shorebirding, there are patches all along the Los Angeles River corridor that offer good birding year-round. From Glendale to Long Beach, the river hosts waterfowl, shorebirds, quite a variety of songbirds and many others. The river's flow is sustained through summer and fall by the effluent from several water treatment plants. It's ironic that this now channelized river maintains its vibrancy because of the release of imported water initially procured only for human consumption.

Small numbers of summering **Common Mergansers** were present along the upper San Gabriel River and elsewhere, with up to twenty-one recorded at Castaic Lagoon on July 16. Though breeding is likely, no confirmation was obtained as in past years.

Up to three **Inca Doves** continued at Lake Los Angeles in the east Antelope Valley through July 11, where a tiny population persists. At least eight **White-winged Doves** were detected over the period.

A few **Black Swifts** continued in the vicinity of Claremont Wilderness Park, with two reported there through August 9. Three more were recorded at Table Mountain in the east San Gabriel Mountains on July 11 (Tom Miko). This species is quite fond of nesting behind waterfalls and Sturtevant Falls above Arcadia used to be the go to spot to see them. The last record from that locale was in 2009. It appears likely that they are breeding elsewhere in the San Gabriels at still undetected locations.

An **American Oystercatcher** at Golden Shore Marine Reserve in Long Beach on July 5 was the only one reported (Becky Turley).

An excellent find was a **Red-necked Stint**, only the third for Los Angeles County and the first since 2013, at Malibu Lagoon from August 22–26 (Chris Lord, et al). The first county record was a bird at Piute Ponds in July of 1983.

The first **Semipalmated Sandpipers** of the fall were represented by two along the Lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on August 13 (Richard Barth, Jeff Boyd) and another at the same location from August 22–23 (Jon Fisher).

Unusual gulls included a **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Malibu Lagoon on June 26 (Ira Blitz) and a **Sabine's Gull** at the Piute Ponds from August 17–19 (Chris Dean). Summering **Glaucous-winged Gulls** included one in Maywood from June 20–24 (Richard Barth), with two in that area on the latter date (Brad Rumble).



A **Black Tern**, more expected as a migrant in the interior, was at Malibu Lagoon on August 23 (Dick Norton).

In May, the abandonment of the large tern colony at Bolsa Chica Lagoon in Orange County- precipitated by multiple disturbances including the illegal flying of a drone onto the island- was an apparent disaster for this year's breeding success. However, many of the **Elegant Terns** that were displaced successfully nested again on two barges in Long Beach Harbor. Efforts by volunteers rescuing chicks that fell off the barges further increased the success of this newly established colony.

A rare **Red-footed Booby** was off Pt. Fermin on June 22 (Jess Morton, Evi Meyer). There are now only about a half dozen records for the county, though nearby Orange and San Diego Counties have recorded considerably more.

**Neotropic Cormorants** continued at a handful of locations and were also found in new areas. About twenty were recorded during the period, with the caveat that some may be the same birds moving around the county. What is inarguable is that this species is rapidly increasing in the county.

**Reddish Egrets** made typically brief stops at Malibu Lagoon on July 2 (Mickey & Jan Long) and again on August 15 (Roger Swanson) and two were there on August 21 (Jonathan Nakai). Another was at Alamitos Bay on August 22 (Keith Quinlivan).

**Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** were represented by at least sixteen in the county from late June through August. In addition, breeding was confirmed at Alamitos Bay (Robb Hamilton).

An early **Northern Harrier** was at Founders Park on the Palos Verdes Peninsula on August 15 (Wendell Covalt).

Early fall migrant **Eastern Kingbirds** were at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on July 9 (Johnny Ivanov) and at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB from July 25–26 (Femi Faminu).

**Plumbeous Vireos** were confirmed breeding along Vincent Gulch Trail in the east San Gabriel Mountains on June 19 (Naresh Stayan). There are a few summer records of this species in this general area, including at Big Rock Creek.

Away from known breeding areas were three **Purple Martins** along Blue Ridge Road in the east San Gabriel Mountains on August 13 (Corey Husic). These were likely post-breeding dispersing birds. Historically this species bred at several locations in the San Gabriels.

A modest but noticeable dispersion of **White-breasted**

**Nuthatches** away from expected areas was noted as early as the end of June, but this event appeared to sputter by mid-July, with no additional reports.

A first of fall **Cedar Waxwing** was at Stephen Sorensen Park in Lake Los Angeles on August 22 (Kimball Garrett). This species is one of the last to depart in spring and first to arrive in fall.

Unusual was an out of season **Hermit Thrush** at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont on July 31 (Ethan Flanagan). Though small numbers breed in the San Gabriel Mountains, a lowland record of an apparently healthy bird on this date is remarkable.

The long-suffering and irrepressibly singing **Brewer's Sparrow** continued along Blue Ridge Road in the east San Gabriel Mountains through June 24. As might have been predicted, this bird never found a mate. Still, an "A" for effort.

Notable was a **White-crowned Sparrow** at Sunset Peak Saddle near Mt. Baldy Village on June 20 (Paul Clarke, Catherine McFadden). This species is not known to summer in the San Gabriels and has largely departed the county by early May except for the occasional straggler.

An early lowland **Wilson's Warbler** was at Eaton Canyon in Pasadena on July 22 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

About eight **Summer Tanagers** recorded over the period was a typical number.

A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was in Lake Hughes on August 10 (Will B.). An **Indigo Bunting** was along the San Gabriel River in South El Monte from July 30-August 21 (Darren Dowell). Also present here from July 31–August 12 was a **Lazuli x Indigo Bunting** (Mark & Janet Scheel).

As we head into September, fall migration will be a more relaxed affair. Vagrants often linger for days and the mad rush of spring- driven by the instinctive drive to reproduce- is lacking. In addition, the birding opportunities are somewhat more diverse. Birders will be on the watch for the potential of irruptive species such as Red-breasted Nuthatches and Varied Thrushes.

Some Mexican species, such as Tropical Kingbirds, undertake a reverse migration to the north and west. While spring holds little chance for Old World species, Asian and Siberian vagrants are in the offing in fall.

Add to all this the usual waterfowl, shorebirds and passerines passing through the area, and you have a rich mix full of possibilities. Fall migration is the time when truly mind-bending records can occur, such as the Eurasian Wryneck found on San Clemente Island in late September of 2017. We shall see what transpires in the coming months. 🐦

# THE INCEPTION OF MY GRAND APPRECIATION FOR ALL THINGS NATURAL

## By Rose White

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED FLOWERS, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF MY NAME....BUT ALSO because of the many hours as a child that I spent exploring my grandmother's lush and varied gardens---expanses that covered both her entire front and back yards.

More than 2 decades ago ----and while I was still a classroom teacher, the Los Angeles Audubon chapter in Culver City gifted me with a week's birding experience in Greenwich, Connecticut----all expenses paid. I had taken my Inner City kindergarten class to their fieldtrip site in a lagoon near the Ballona Wetlands in Playa del Rey, prepped them well replete with the knowledge of how to use a microscope to investigate the multitude of organisms that inhabit such waters. In fact, when they found out that my students were so young they negated the use of microscopes on that trip to the point that both the students and I protested in disappointment. That was an eye-opening and wonderous experience for all involved and the next thing I knew one of the directors of student engagement had me on the phone interviewing me for that marvelous, summer experience back East.

While in Connecticut, I had an opportunity to walk old growth forests, examine rock walls, go birding both in the daylight and at night, explore the shores for horseshoe crabs, dine in an ancient barn that had been reconstructed on the site from which I learned some spectacular new recipes, take classes in ecology/conservation/recycling-reuse/activism and much much more. I still have two t-shirts that I purchased on that trip, made by the camp counselors---one that was hand-illustrated with acrylic bird droppings that I wear every Halloween and another that shows an array of mushrooms that we came across in the forests during that week. I can count on one hand the number of compliments I get about that mushroom t-shirt every time I wear it.

Undoubtedly, my teaching of science and all things natural that following year was enhanced immensely as I turned my school site environment into a mini-Audubon site. We went birding for Plovers, Killdeer, pigeons and gulls; one even built a nest in the middle of the faculty parking lot and had to be protected by the school's custodian. We adopted several trees on the grounds and chronicled the changes they went through over the months in close observation/discussion and art. We collected seed pods that fell from the trees and used them as templates for reverse tie-dying swatches of cloth (THAT was the craze way back then) that we quilted and turned into TV Watching Pillows for Father's Day gifts.

My own regard for nature went through a paradigm shift that fateful summer as well and has been evolving ever since. I have an incredible regard for the natural surroundings of my own, personal urban landscape. I "built" a few "rock walls" on my property after I had some retaining walls refurbished and elected not to throw the pieces of the old structures in the trash. Of course, you can barely see them now as they have been overgrown with ivy. I rejected the notion to install solar panels on my roof because the companies that gave me bids said that I would have to cut-down or severely cut-back the two 70 year old Italian Stone Pines and the Canary Island Pine that flank my house and cover my roof. Ironically, those 3 trees have kept my house on the "cool side" the 40 years that I have lived here and preserved the roof that I only recently had rebuilt.

I don't consider myself a formally-trained nor self-taught birder...just a curious observer that consults the multitude of books on birds I bought when I was an unretired teacher. I have spotted on my property owls, hawks, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, mourning doves, blue jays, and some tiny noisy birds that look like gray "radishes" with beaks. I even saw a brilliantly colorful orangy-yellow bird the other day flitting around a neighbor's property; can't decide if it's a type of Oriole or a Tanager. I've potted milkweed throughout my garage-top succulent garden to attract migrating Monarchs ( the kind I saw once when I visited Michoacan, Mexico), as well as other entertaining pollinators.

During the 2020 Covid pandemic I had the privilege of "caretaking" several families of Black Phoebes that decided to use my backyard as a test flight path for their various off-spring. What a delightful distraction that was at such an anxiety-producing period in our nation's history. I kept a diary from May 'til September of those exploits, even took a photo or two that I would love to share with you, as well.

So, these are my recollections in response to your all-call for member contributions.

Sincerely,  
Rose White





# LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!

by Michael H. Lester

*I have heard  
in the Kingdom of birds  
in early spring  
there will be a coronation  
of a white-crowned sparrow*

*there she is  
perched on a picket fence  
preening  
her ruffled feathers  
on this day of days*

*I am witness  
to the changing of the guard  
a celebration of life—  
above all the others  
they have chosen my yard*

*in the birdbath  
three ladies in waiting  
dip their heads  
in the fresh clear water  
and shake them off again*

*presiding  
a plump California Towhee  
with her orange rump  
facing the curious finches  
red-faced and solemn*



White-crowned Sparrow | Photo Courtesy of Garry George



California Towhee | Photo Courtesy of Tjie Poo

*I am proud to announce the publication of my second children's book, Johnny and Frankie's Summer Sleepover, which you can find on Amazon.com. Sincerely, Michael H. Lester, [www.michael-lester.com](http://www.michael-lester.com)*

# THE CIRCUS IS IN TOWN

by Michael H. Lester

I am witness to some especially exciting hawk activity in the backyard this morning, along with a circus of dark-eyed juncos, mockingbirds, Black Phoebes, California Towhee's, house finches, and squirrels. The hawk startles an adult squirrel, who has been camping out on the squirrel-proof feeder, sphinxlike, for nearly half an hour, into a sudden and urgent leap to safety in the neighbor's magnolia grandiflora. The feeder swings madly back and forth from the shock.

*a Cooper's hawk  
glides magnificently  
over the yard  
pursuing its winged prey  
with frightening precision*

A mockingbird and a Black Phoebe casually observe the spectacle from a high wire, as if they know they are not a target for those razor-sharp talons and flesh-shredding beak. The house finches scatter and head for the cover of the orange tree overhanging the garage. The dark-eyed junco cowers in the bushes. The hawk disappears, but a moment later its shadow flashes across the lawn, signaling that it is circling overhead. Perhaps, it has not yet captured its prey.



*a large selection  
of delectable dinner items  
flutter about the yard—  
how is a poor Cooper's hawk  
to make up his mind?*

The female hawk built their nest in the sycamore in front of our house. The nest is too high up and camouflaged by the thick foliage, so I cannot see if there are open-mouthed chicks tucked in the nest crying for food.

*the egg cooker  
releases a shrill whistle  
the coffee is done  
a squirrel hangs upside down  
munching seed from the feeder*



# THE VELOCITY MASTER

by Richard Knight

I survive by speed and pinpoint accuracy; threading a moving needle at 180 miles per hour. To achieve less is to perish into the eternal dust. From my reign high above the earth, nothing escapes my eyes. I hunt in all environments; from dense cities, skyscrapers. I hunt in remote islands where few humans know my name. I slice through the air with ease, while the other birds plough through it with hardship. I am a product of my design; it makes me who and what I am.

My muscles pump me towards the sun. At 3,000 feet, even the most observant of my prey, will not know I am here. Soaring effortlessly, I am patient. A speck in a vast ocean of blue.

most observant of my prey,

patient. A speck in a vast

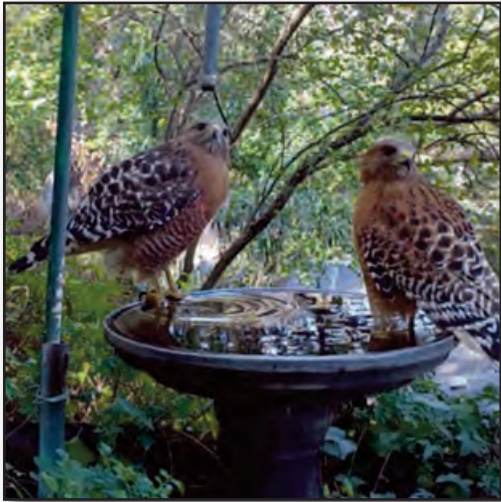


A Green-wing Teal in flight! Far below. It is time; I fold my wings close to my body and plunge. The physics of gravity and velocity are ingrained in every fiber of my being; evolution of form, function and survival. This is the spectacle of nature known as the stoop ( dive ). At the apex of my stoop, I may achieve speeds in excess of 200 miles an hour.

Plummeting faster to my target, I precisely adjust my wings and tail to fine tune my descent. I shall not miss. My strike is solid and lethal. Perfection! Such success are few and far between for myself and all like me. Predators hit their targets roughly 1 in 10 attempts; life is never easy and a kill is never taken for granted.

# WE HAVE A BIRDBATH

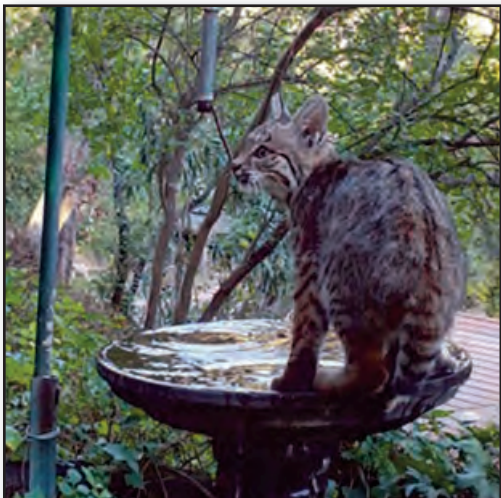
by Susan Lapham



We have a birdbath outside our home—and we attached a hose to create a continuous “drip” to attract the birds. A picture is worth “how many words?”



We put up a “trail camera” to take the photos. We were pleasantly surprised to see the bath had night time visitors, too.



And occasionally, other wildlife stopped by.





# THE LOS ANGELES CARDINAL

by Rachelle A. Arslan



*Cardinal photo from Pixabay*

From the time I was a teenager, the Northern cardinal has held a special place in my heart. When my family was forced to move from Los Angeles to the mid-west when I was 15, I was heartbroken to leave my home. However, the first time I saw a bright red male Cardinal on a black iron fence against the stark white snow, I felt a sense of hope, renewal and peace. I cannot explain why. It was just a natural, emotional and spiritual response to this unique and beautiful bird in such a desolate, barren setting.

Imagine my excitement years later when I found out that there is a small population of cardinals in Southern California. Introduced in Los Angeles and Hawaii, sightings in California have been reported in Ornithological Literature since 1880.

Of all my years of living in Southern California, I had never been lucky enough to witness one. I would read reports on ebird and once in a while I would hear anecdotes. A male cardinal had been spotted in Bolsa Chica Wetlands. A pair was seen in the Sepulveda Basin. Of course, none of these were confirmed. Plus, these locations weren't exactly in the neighborhood. I figured winning the lottery would be more viable than finding a cardinal in my backyard.

Last month, however, a neighbor posted a photo online that he had taken of a familiar red bird. He said he saw it that morning in front of his house, adding, "I never saw a bird like this before. What is it? Hope to see more of these!" The bird in the photo was unmistakable. A male Northern cardinal! Another neighbor replied to the post, saying that he'd seen the bird in his yard the same morning. My heart skipped a beat.

I ventured out with my binoculars, scouring the neighborhood, scrutinizing every tree, bush and telephone pole. I saw pigeons and House Finches. I saw a Black Phoebe. I spotted a pair of ravens soaring and tumbling in mid-air. I even saw a Vaux's swift chasing an insect in flight, but no cardinal. I was disappointed but not surprised. After all, it's one tiny bird in a huge urban world. Finding it would not be easy.

Now, whenever I leave the house, I am always on the lookout for the Cardinal. It's not much different than my usual outings. I am always looking up as most birders do, trying to find my avian friends in their natural habitats, attempting to identify new friends I have not yet seen. My Cardinal pursuit will continue as I am not easily dissuaded when it comes to birds. I am hoping one day to see a flit of bright red and hear the cheerful call of the familiar friend who comforted me on that cold day so long ago.