

WESTERN TANAGER

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The endangered Imperial Parrot | Photo by P. Reillo, RSCF, TCI/FIU. Story on page 4



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ON THE COVER

The endangered Sisserou or Imperial Parrot is the national bird of Dominica, and is emblazoned on the island's flag, coat-of-arms, Parliamentary Mace and other national symbols. It is found only in the wild on the island of Dominica. | Photo by P. Reillo, RSCF, TCI/FIU

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LAAS FIELD TRIPS SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

Los Angeles Audubon's Field Trip offerings will continue to be suspended for the foreseeable future, due to safety considerations relating to the novel coronavirus. Government access parties for trips to Seal Beach NWR, the Condor Preserve, etc., are not even penciling in trips "in hopes of improving circumstances". LAAS does not wish to condone or promote activities that bring people together, or move them well away from their homes (the opposite of safer-at-home). With new Covid-19 cases presently spiking at unprecedented numbers as we go to press, we do not anticipate a change in situation for at the very least a couple of newsletter cycles, which means the earliest listings to be hoped for will be for trips starting in mid-November. For the time being, to get a little exercise (and birding), LAAS recommends visiting parks in your "patch" with family (if they tolerate birds well!), and sharing your sightings on social media such as LACOUNTYBIRDS. And don't forget to wear your mask! Social distancing is over six feet AND a mask, not over six feet OR a mask!

—Nick Freeman

Visit us online at www.laaudubon.org for updates on ALL LAAS events, meetings, bird walks, lectures and more.

TOP WAYS TO PRESERVE NATURE WHILE HIKING

By Rachel Gaffney

Going for a hike is a popular way to get regular exercise. More than 30 million people hit the hiking trails across the country every year for both day hikes and multiple day hikes. However, all that foot traffic on trails and through the wilderness can decimate the local ecosystem. There's no way to avoid damage to the environment when that many people are hiking. But there are things that individual hikers can do to minimize their impact on the environment and preserve the natural world around them. Always do these five things when you're hiking to do your part to protect nature when you're hiking:

STAY ON THE HIKING TRAIL

The biggest amount of damage to the environment done by hikers comes from hikers not staying on the marked trails. Hiking trails are designed to make hiking safer and to protect the local environment by keeping hikers out of areas where they could kill plants and trees. Carving your own path can cause massive destruction to the ecosystem. Use a trail map and make sure that you are always using marked trails when you're hiking.

CHOOSE YOUR PICNIC SPOT CAREFULLY

Many trails have shelters or designated areas where people can eat in order to make sure that the animals in the area are safe and that hikers don't destroy the land when they set up a picnic or start a fire to cook food. Use grills and fire pits at shelters and picnic spots. Many of these areas also have clean water sources so you can fill up your water bottles too. Never start fires anywhere except a designated area and clean up thoroughly when you're done.

KEEP YOUR DOG LEASHED

Hiking with your dog is a lot of fun and it's great exercise for your dog. But, you need to be sure that your dog isn't causing havoc on the local landscape. Keep your dog on a leash so that your dog doesn't chase animals or annoy other hikers. Clean up after your dog and be sure to take the waste with you and dispose of it properly. Keep the dog on the trail with you and don't let it wander off the trail.

DON'T LITTER

You might be surprised at how many hikers think it's acceptable to leave behind food wrappers, bits of food, sandwich bags, and other trash. It isn't acceptable. Always pack your trash in a bag or backpack and take it out of the area with you so that you can dispose of it the right way. Many trails have recycling bins and trash bins at the start and end of the trail so that hikers can throw away their trash. Never litter on the trail. If you pack it in, you should pack it out.

LEAVE EVERYTHING WHERE YOU FIND IT

Picking flowers and leaves, taking stones or twigs, or picking up other souvenirs and taking them home isn't a good ideal. If everyone did that soon there would be no flowers and the trees would be stripped of their healthy leaves. Take photos but not actual souvenirs.

Rachel Gaffney works for Personal Injury Help, an organization dedicated to providing the public with information about personal injury and safety information. When she is not working, Rachel enjoys hiking and exploring new trails nearby!

WINGING IT: DISCOVERING THE CARIBBEAN BIRDING TRAIL

PART 2: DOMINICA — THE RARE PARROTS' PARADISE

By Robbie Lisa Freeman



With the number of breeding adults estimated now to be below 50 pairs, the Imperial (Sisserou) Parrot is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Hurricanes, as well as natural and man-made habitat loss, the black market capture and sale of birds, and a low reproduction rate are among the issues that threaten survival of these great birds. | Photo by Stephen Durand.

The morning sky was gray and the clouds thick with the threat of more rain. What had started out earlier as light showers had turned into a steady downpour as we sat perched on a wet wooden bench beneath a camouflage poncho, expertly strung up as a makeshift tarp by our bird guide. You could tell “Dr. Birdy” had done this before. As one of the top bird guides on the small island of Dominica, Bertrand Jno Baptiste, nicknamed “Dr. Birdy”, was attempting to show my husband and me the national treasure of Dominica, the Imperial Parrot (*Amazona imperialis*), locally called the Sisserou. One of only two endemic birds of the island nation, the Sisserou had eluded many a birder, we knew. But we were hopeful. And patient. And we had flown 3,741 miles to see it. So, of course we would be rewarded, we reasoned.

Dr. Birdy’s scope was strategically situated, pointing out over a ravine toward a mountain of trees in the foothills of Morne Diablotin, where the shy Sisserou is known to flock, forage, and nest. In the right conditions, the parrots would swoop up from the treetops, regaling ecstatic birders with

their raucous squawks. In. The. *Right*. Conditions. Those conditions being a sunny, windless early morning. It was not sunny. It was not windless. It was raining... harder now.

Still, though the sky may have been charged with negative ions, our hearts were charged with hope. Hope is a good thing to have as a birder. It’s what draws you out of bed before dawn, guides you over far distances, and urges you along on breathlessly high, difficult switchback trails, or through dense, thorny scrub. And so, we sat—on our wet wooden bench—getting up now and then to walk to the railing overlooking the ravine, binoculars ready. Occasionally a parrot call pierced the downpour. We laughed about putting a time clock on the birds. Earlier, along the trail, our guide had shown us a Blue-headed Hummingbird that would religiously appear and perch on a specific shrub every six minutes. It’s good when a bird is that punctual. But as any birder knows, nature is mostly unpredictable. And today was no exception. The weather continued to degrade in a way that would likely discourage any Sisserou Parrots from leaving the safety of the trees. So, we took the time to learn more about the endangered parrots: how their populations were fairing, how the hurricanes had impacted them, how their future looked.

Dr. Birdy worked for many years as a Forestry Officer with the Dominica Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division (FWD) of the Ministry of Agriculture. There he became acquainted with the island’s migrating and breeding bird species. He conducted field surveys, taxonomy, blood sampling and other research. He also learned about the decades of conservation efforts around the Imperial Parrot and the only other endemic bird of Dominica, the Red-necked Parrot (*Amazona arausiaca*), locally known as the Jaco. Both rare birds are considered model examples demonstrating how conservation stewardship can reap tremendous rewards for maintaining wild bird biodiversity. However, it is the Imperial Parrot that holds a very special place in the heart of Dominicans and the conservation world. As the largest of 27 Amazon species of parrot worldwide, the Imperial Parrot is only found in the wild on Dominica, primarily in the Morne Diablotin and Morne Trois Pitons National Parks. That alone makes it a jewel to conservationists. But equally important: this bird is a testimony to resiliency. In 1979, when the category 4 hurricane, Hurricane David, hit Dominica, it devastated the Imperial Parrot population. Only about 50 individual birds survived, according to information provided by Paul Reillo, Ph.D., president of the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation (RSCF) and director of the Tropical Conservation Institute at Florida International University. This prompted the launch of a new parrot program in 1980 involving the FWD and the World



The Jaco or Red-necked Parrot had increased in numbers to more than 1200 birds in 2003, but after Hurricane Maria numbers have been estimated to be much smaller. | Photo by P. Reillo, RSCF, TCI/FIU

Wildlife Fund (WWF), with the goal of assessing the impact of David on island wildlife and exploring new conservation efforts.

In 1996, the RSCF initiated the Wildlife Conservation Partnership with FWD to provide equipment to assist in the recovery of the species. Over the years, the program achieved critical conservation milestones, including the creation of Morne Diablotin National Park, and new discoveries about the parrots' ecologies, behavior, reproduction and recovery potential.

"Wild parrot conservation efforts following Hurricane David proved to be very effective, especially when used in tandem with increased monitoring, public education, programs to ease agriculture and parrot conflicts, protective legislation and parks zoning," said Lisa Sorenson, Ph.D., executive director of BirdsCaribbean, an international network committed to conserving birds of the Caribbean. "As a result of these efforts, the numbers of Imperial Parrots, prior to Hurricane Maria, had grown to roughly 400-450, and the Jaco Parrot's number had risen to about 1200."

So it was heart-stopping for many conservationists around the globe when Hurricane Maria, a category 5 hurricane, hit Dominica in September of 2017. "It was the

worst hurricane I have experienced as an adult," said Dr. Birdy. "News reported surface winds of 160 MPH. Its force continued for 8 hours. Afterwards, there was not one leaf on these forest trees," he said, gesturing around us.

With bird habitats decimated, conservation groups again rallied to come to the aid of Dominica's parrots. According to Sorenson, BirdsCaribbean, the RSCF, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) worked with Dominica's FWD, sending surveyors, bird feeders, seed, tools, and field equipment to assist in the recovery of the species. Injured birds were captured and taken to a rehabilitation aviary operated by the FWD, with the goal of treating and releasing them back into the wild.

Conservationists who had previously witnessed the parrots' resilience and recovery in the wild were confident that recovery could happen again. So, it took experts by surprise when on March 17th, 2018 — six months after Maria — sources reported that two Sisserou Parrots and ten Jaco Parrots at the aviary had been exported from Dominica to a captive breeding facility in Germany, under the guise of an emergency action for species protection.

After learning of the export, thirteen international conservation organizations joined together to express alarm in a letter to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). That controversy still roils today, as conservation groups continue to press for answers regarding the justification for the export and to lament the loss of birds that could have continued to breed in the wild, helping to grow the fragile population of Imperial Parrots.

"When safety net captive populations for Caribbean Amazon Parrots are warranted, they can and should be accomplished in their natural ecosystems within a network of officially protected areas," said Dr. Reillo in a recent article in *Hemisphere* magazine. "Exporting wild birds to distant foreign aviaries under a pretense of saving species paralyzes ongoing conservation successes that take generations to achieve."

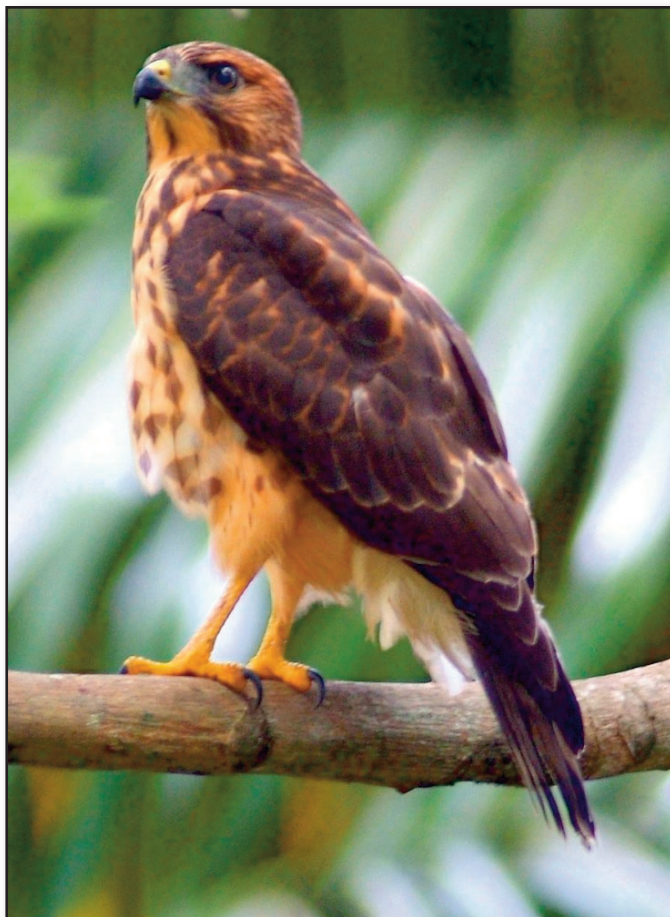
But there is some good news since Maria. The forests are growing back. And the Jaco Parrot seems on its way to a solid recovery, according to Dr. Birdy. "Hurricanes can create new habitats for parrots," he said. "The parrots have more nesting holes in dead trees. They find new sources of food in the lower mountain elevations. And once the forests regenerate, parrots can return to their homes. Today, I see bigger flocks of the Jaco Parrot than I have ever seen in my career as a birder," he told us as we returned to the entrance of the Syndicate Nature Trail. As if to put an exclamation point on his statement, we were greeted there by a dozen or so garrulous Jaco Parrots, who clucked to us from the treetops, trying to soothe our disappointment at not seeing their reclusive relatives. And soothe us they did, with their display of vivid colors: the green wings and back, red throat, bluish head and yellow tail feathers. Seeing their numbers, we felt encouraged

for the Jaco Parrot. As for the elusive Sisserou, we would have to continue hoping as we headed south to hike the only other known nesting area of the parrot, the Morne Trois Pitons National Park.

Southern Dominica

Morne Trois Pitons National Park dominates the southern half of Dominica. In 1975, it was the first park in the Caribbean to be designated a nature preserve — and with good reason. Within its boundaries are unspoiled mountain peaks, waterfalls, tropical forests, and lakes, many accessible via easy treks, while others, like the Valley of Desolation, you'd hike only on a dare. We chose the Emerald Pool as our first hike and spotted one of Dominica's three known Accipitridae, the Broad-winged Hawk. It was the first raptor we had seen during our two weeks in the Caribbean. Though many migrate during the winter from North America, some subspecies have become year-round residents in the Caribbean.

A day later, a hike to Trafalgar Falls rewarded us not only with its beautiful twin falls, but with a sighting of the Caribbean Elaenia, a small flycatcher with a shrill whistle, found only in Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles Islands. According to Dominica's Forestry Division, 65 species of birds have been found to breed only on Dominica and a few other surrounding Caribbean Islands. For example, the Blue-headed Hummingbird is found only on Dominica and Martinique, while the Plumbeous Warbler is endemic only to Dominica, Guadeloupe and Marie Gallante islands. As we mapped our path for the next few days, focusing primarily on waterfall hikes in the foothills of Morne Trois Pitons, we kept eyes and ears tuned to sight any of these special Caribbean birds.



The Broad-winged Hawk lives in forests, preferring to spend its time beneath canopied trees. Five subspecies are endemic to the Caribbean and do not migrate. | Photo by P. Reillo, RSCF, TCI/FIU



The Blue-headed Hummingbird is found only on Dominica and Martinique. The male typically displays colors of iridescent blues and greens that catch the light on bright days. | Photo by P. Reillo, RSCF, TCI/FIU



The Gray Kingbird, or Pitirre, is a flycatcher found widely in the Caribbean. It has a much larger bill than North America's Eastern Kingbird. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman



The Caribbean Elaenia is an alert flycatcher found in woodlands or semi-open areas of brush and trees. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman



Bananaquits, small nectivores abundant throughout the West Indies, Mexico and beyond, have curved beaks, a bright yellow chest, charcoal-black head, wings and tail, and a wide white eye stripe. | Photo By Robbie Lisa Freeman

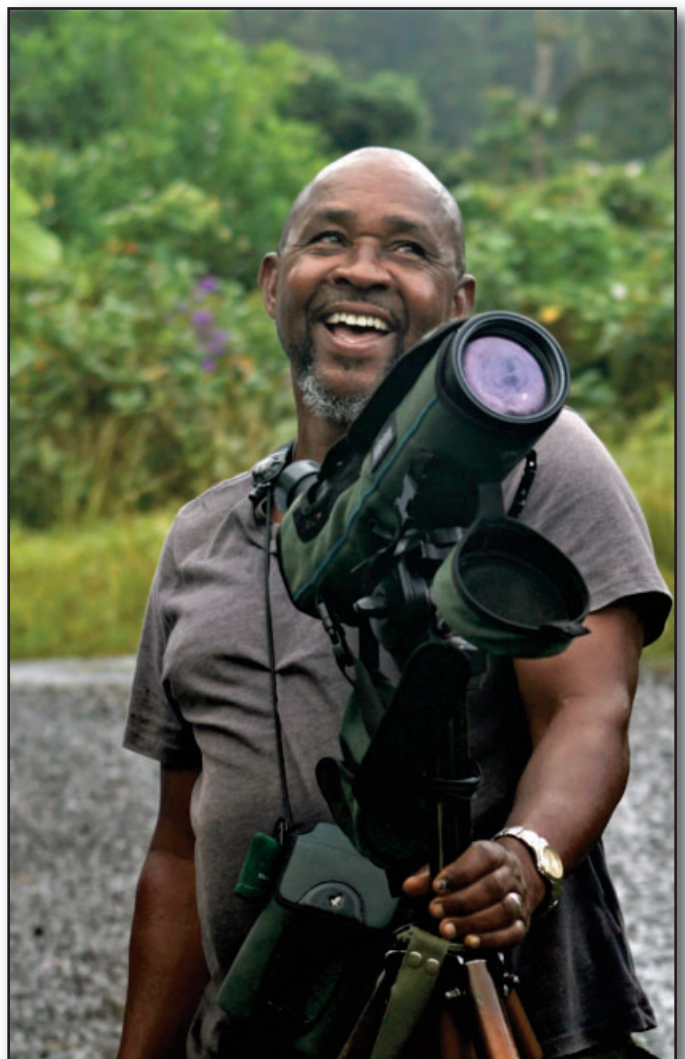
Our final hike was a rigorous trek to Middleham Falls, one of the highest waterfalls in Dominica. While birds whistled and called all around us, our attention became focused on clambering over damp, slippery boulders and making sure we followed the right path, often unseeable beyond the tricky mountain stream crossings. Ninety minutes after setting out, we were greeted by a magnificent waterfall. We stood and soaked up its power and the beauty of the forest. Our adventure to Dominica was coming to a close. It was all over, it seemed, but the hike back. It had been a good trip. Would it have been better if we had sighted our Sisserou Parrot? Of course. But we couldn't complain. We were in paradise.

Thirty minutes into our return trek, as we topped a final boulder ending the steepest part of our uphill climb, we were stopped cold in our tracks. Above us, the unmistakable squawk of a Sisserou Parrot pierced the air and a large purplish-gray bird swooped over the treetops. We gawked, then grinned at each other. Nature is indeed unpredictable in so many ways. 🐦

This is the second in a series about the Caribbean Birding Trail. Stay tuned for the next story on St. Lucia in an upcoming issue.

Robbie Lisa Freeman is a public relations professional in the health, fitness and wellness industry and a contributing writer to the Western Tanager, chapter newsletter of the Los Angeles Audubon Society.

The islands of the Caribbean are home to 171 endemic species of birds. To learn more about these birds and how to support their conservation through bird and nature tourism, visit the websites of the nonprofit regional conservation organization BirdsCaribbean at BirdsCaribbean.org and CaribbeanBirdingTrail.org. Follow them on social media @BirdsCaribbean.



One of the foremost birding experts on Dominica, Bertrand Jno Baptiste, aka "Dr. Birdy", has been studying the endangered parrots of the island for more than 30 years. He can be reached at (767) 245-4768 or by email at: drbirdy58@gmail.com. | Photo by Robbie Lisa Freeman

CONSERVATION CORNER

Rio de Los Angeles State Park Riparian Breeders

By Andrew Birch

Once in a while, it's good to celebrate a conservation success story on public land, right in the heart of the city. Rio de Los Angeles State Park appears to be a real success story in terms of re-wilding a small section of a park that sits within an intensely urbanized setting. The park is located in northeast Los Angeles, approximately 2.5 miles north of downtown and is located next to the former Union Pacific Rail Yard called the Taylor Yard complex, which is also under active long-term planning as a city park.

When the park was conceived, a small area (less than 10%) was set aside for riparian habitat creation/restoration that would be managed by the California Parks. Through habitat management and kudos to Debs Park Audubon Center who has enlisted volunteers to help, this area has been allowed to grow without the excessive maintenance that is all too familiar at the rest of LA's city parks.

From the early days, this little patch of habitat has shown potential with the occasional BELL'S VIREO stopping off for a day or two in the spring to sing and a returning pair of breeding BLUE GROSBEAKS in 2017 and 2018. But this year, as the habitat has matured, no doubt helped by the recent winter's rains and a lack of foot traffic, it has really shown its value. Despite its diminutive size, it is a case of build it and they will come for rare breeding riparian birds. There are currently, 4 singing BELL'S VIREOS and I'm hopeful at least one of these birds will breed. Even more excitingly, there is now also a pair of YELLOW-BREASTED CHATS. You can hear the chats singing their raucous song as soon as you step out of the car. Other uncommon migrants this spring have also included WILLOW FLYCATCHER.

When I have seen workers doing habitat management this spring, it has been pleasing to see that they have been careful to leave the riparian habitat untouched and have just done minimal grass clearing taking great care not to disturb the native plantings. If the same vision, care and consideration can be extended to



the adjacent Taylor Yard plans and an even larger section of undisturbed riparian habitat could be created and annexed, the city could gain a critically large area of restored habitat for more of these endangered species. It would make it one of the most important areas for rare breeding riparian birds in the county. All within a few miles of downtown.

I'm a local birder that has lived and birded in LA for over 20 years. I've illustrated books and many birding/wildlife magazines over the past 30+ years. I hung up my brushes and binoculars when we had kids but have recently started to get back to painting and doing more birding
—Andy

YOUNG BIRDERS

Charismatic and Clever: The Cactus Wren (*campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

By Dessi Sieburth

The Cactus Wren is appropriately named because this large wren depends on cacti for nesting and foraging. There are two main populations of the Cactus Wren—desert and coastal. The desert population ranges from southeastern California to central Texas, and south to Michoacán, central Mexico, and the coastal population ranges from southern Ventura County to northern Baja California. Cactus Wrens in the desert prefer dense stands of Joshua Trees or saguaros, while on the coastal slope, Cactus Wrens prefer dry hills dotted with prickly pear and cholla cacti.

Cactus Wrens often perch out in the open, but they can also be secretive as they skulk through cacti, so the best way to detect them is to learn their low churring call, which sounds almost like a car engine trying to start. In addition to knowing the call, one of the best ways to find the wrens is to look for large ball-shaped lumps of sticks and grasses within a cactus—these are the nests of the Cactus Wren. Cactus Wrens can be identified by their large size (they are the largest wren in the United States) as well as the black spots on the breast and the white eyebrow. Males and females look alike, and juveniles are slightly paler.



Cactus Wren on cholla cactus. | Illustration by Dessi Sieburth

Though still considered a common species, the Cactus Wren has declined by over 55 percent over the last 50 years. This decline has taken place largely in the coastal populations, where development has rapidly eradicated nearly all suitable habitat. Within Los Angeles County, for example, the species was formerly found in the Baldwin Hills, in Castaic, and in the San Fernando Valley, where development has destroyed nearly all chaparral habitat. An extensive Cactus Wren survey in 2012 found that there were only three populations in coastal Los Angeles: the Palos Verdes Peninsula (28 pairs), the Big Tujunga Wash (6 pairs) and the eastern San Gabriel Valley (122 pairs).



Cactus Wren nest in cholla cactus at Big Tujunga Wash near Orcas Park, Los Angeles County, March 15, 2020. | Photo by Dessi Sieburth

Cactus Wrens are perfectly adapted to their dry environment. They get nearly all of their water from food, which consists of insects and cactus fruit. They place their nests deep within a cactus, which protects the nest from predators. They often make multiple “dummy” nests to distract predators and provide themselves with a safe roosting site. Due to these precautions, Cactus Wrens have a high reproductive success, and they can nest up to three times per year.



Cactus Wren at Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park, Los Angeles County, March 18, 2015. | Photo by Derek Sieburth.



White arrows show three Cactus Wren nests, and at least two are “dummy” nests. Big Tujunga Wash near Orcas Park, Los Angeles County, March 15, 2020. Photo by Dessi Sieburth.

Development has threatened the population in parts of the Big Tujunga Wash. The creation of Angeles National Golf Club in 2004 destroyed much habitat on the east side of the wash that was previously occupied by at least five pairs of Cactus Wrens. No mitigation for the Cactus Wrens occurred, and after the creation of the golf course, the wrens were only found occasionally in the vicinity of the golf course, with the last nesting reported in 2011. The last sighting of a Cactus Wren in this area was north of the golf course on November 12, 2017.

The recent increase in wildfires especially threatens coastal Cactus Wren populations. For example, the six pairs of Cactus Wrens inhabiting the Big Tujunga Wash near Orcas Park were reduced to just one to two pairs following the 2018 Creek Fire, and no Cactus Wrens have been seen in the area since September of 2019. It appears that this isolated population has disappeared. Small patches of cacti remain in this area, but recolonization seems unlikely, because Cactus Wrens require large, intact stands of cacti.

How can we help coastal Cactus Wren populations? The remaining Cactus Wren habitat in coastal Los Angeles County needs to be protected from development. New Cactus Wren habitat needs to be created, and the wren’s use of the

habitat needs to be monitored and studied. We all can help these birds by reporting our bird sightings to eBird, the database of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which keeps track of bird populations. Conservationists can use this data to help declining species, like the Cactus Wren.

Thanks to Kimball Garrett and Mickey Long for providing history on the Cactus Wren habitat prior to the creation of the Angeles National Golf Club, as well as Brad Rumble for providing some of the photos. 🐦

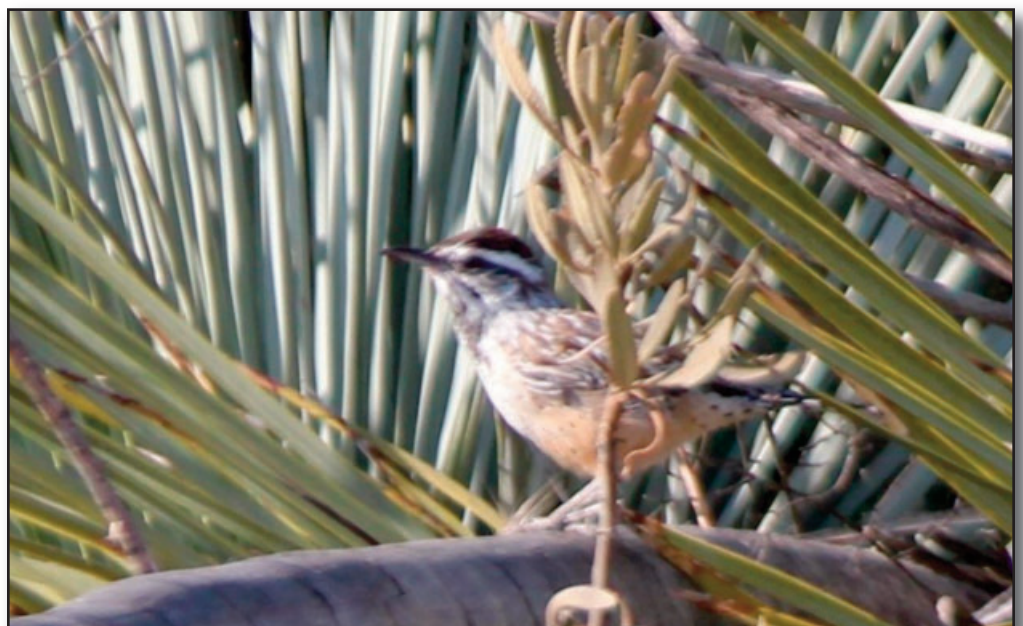
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www.ebird.org



This Cactus Wren was seen and photographed north of Angeles National Golf Club by Brad Rumble on November 12, 2017.

Neighborhood adjacent to Cactus Wren habitat, Big Tujunga Wash near Orcas Park, Los Angeles County, March 15, 2020. | Photo by Dessi Sieburth.



Cactus Wrens at Big Tujunga Wash, near Orcas Park on September 18, 2019. | Photo by Brad Rumble.

The 2018 Creek Fire destroyed much of the Cactus Wren habitat in the Big Tujunga Wash near Orcas Park. | Photo by Beatrix Schwarz



OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Experience and Perspective

By Cindy Hardin, Director of Outdoor Education

I grew up in a coastal city in Orange County. I was able to attend some very good public schools, and enjoy endless summer days riding bicycles to the beach with my friends. My hometown was often singled out as a hotbed of conservatism, and in some ways, this was quite true.

However, my father was in the newspaper business, and daily events, on both a national and international level, were nightly discussion topics at the dinner table. Our family was also lucky enough to be able to travel, and I was exposed to different countries, languages and cultures throughout my youth. As I grew into adulthood, many years of working in the restaurant industry continued my exposure to diversity amongst people. As a result, I was quite aware from an early age that great inequality was a hard fact in our nation.

But it was an incident that occurred during my volunteer days at the Ballona Wetlands that brought home this inequality on a visceral level. It was my first year as a volunteer naturalist with the program, way back in 1999. I was leading a tour of third graders. These children were mostly eight and nine years old. Due to our proximity to LAX, our walks are often interrupted by the noise of planes flying overhead. As one of these zoomed over our heads, one child stated that he had “been on a plane, been in a train, and in a car”. Another child in the group responded with this statement:

“I would like to go on a plane someday, but I’m a Foster Kid, and there’s no money for me”.

This stopped me dead in my tracks, and obviously, over twenty years later, is still on my mind. Here was a child, whose age had not even yet reached the double digits, acutely aware of the limitations of his present existence. I managed to recover quickly, resume the tour, and of course made a point to give a little extra encouragement to the child who wished for a ride on a plane.

The mission of LA Audubon, to provide access, understanding and appreciation of nature for all, is the driving force of the hands-on work that we do. As a volunteer I understood and appreciated the intent. But it was this overheard conversation that made me realize that the work we do can be an equalizer. The child who had experienced different transportation modes was having the same outdoor opportunity as the self-declared foster child. While our target audience is students from underserved schools, we also handle a small number of districts that are smaller, better funded, and serve an entirely different demographic. The good news is that during our tours, each and every student is provided with a more or less identical (as this involves the ever-changing natural world, never exactly “identical”!) experience. For the three hours students spend with LA Audubon, the



playing field is level. And in an average year, we host over 3,000 children on field trips to the Ballona Wetlands and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area!

Our programs go beyond the field trips for the younger set. Our Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program for local high schoolers has just completed its twelfth year. This year-long after school program teaches students the principles of environmental stewardship with hands-on activities and projects in the Baldwin Hills. College readiness is also a part of this, and participating students are guided through the college application process. There are many in the Greenhouse program who are the first in their family to see college as an option, and acceptance rates for enrollment in to institutions of higher education are quite high for our senior “Greenhouse kids”. Students from our program have gone on to attend schools like Brown University, Amherst College, UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, Humboldt State University, CSU Long Beach, as well as our local community colleges. Even better, some who were first introduced to LA Audubon through Greenhouse have returned to Los Angeles after graduating from college, and are now staff members!

LA Audubon has also completed its first academic year of partnership with West Los Angeles College through the Conservation Studies Program, a certificate program for aspiring restoration ecologists and community members who want to better understand the ecology in their neighborhoods. The field trip program at Kenneth Hahn includes internships for at least 5 college students annually. Completion of programs for the older students provides them with real life experience that is essential to resume building, and references from a well-known non-profit: your LA Audubon!

As I write this, our nation is convulsed in protests around the vast inequities in America. Hopefully, by the time this article is published our voices will have been heard, and at least incremental steps are being taken to make real change in the systemic, institutionalized racism that has been part and parcel of our country for centuries. There is a popular saying: “be the change that you want to see”. The programs that I have described are

making that change, and being done right here, in a city that is a poster child for these inequities in our society. Our work is not only focused on addressing environmental justice and encouraging access for all to the natural world. Through our outreach and education, we hope to enhance and heal the environment by teaching better stewardship of the earth. Our restoration work in the Baldwin Hills is the realization of these goals.

Although feelings of sadness and helplessness are all too understandable given the current situation in our country and world, action is a great antidote to despair. We are currently working on a campaign for an endowment that will support our work. The tagline is “Nature Demands Action”, and there are several ways that you can help. Time is a valuable contribution, and when we get the greenlight to continue our elementary education program, we will be seeking volunteers to help provide experiences in nature to the students of Los Angeles. Too often when someone hears the term “Audubon Society” the assumption is made that this is a group that is just for birders. Although observation and protection of birds and their habitats is one of our missions, the Los Angeles chapter of the Audubon Society is so much more than a birding club. We strive to break the stereotype that birding, enjoying and accessing nature is an activity for a narrow demographic group. We practice that through our education and outreach programs that are aimed at underserved communities and people of color. Spreading the word amongst your friends and colleagues about LA Audubon is also helpful to our cause—we want people to know that we are an organization of action and change! And of course, the traditional, tax deductible donation is essential to allowing us to continue providing our fantastic programs and projects.

I wonder from time to time about the young boy I met so many years ago, and if he ever got that ride on a plane. And it is my wish that I live long enough to see a world where children everywhere see only possibilities, and not limitations, in this world. And I am truly grateful on a personal level to work for an organization that strives to achieve just that. 🕊️

INTERPRETING NATURE

Making Connections Between Birding and Food Gardening

By Ingrid Carrillo, Restoration & Education Staff Member

A NEED FOR CONNECTION

When I first started to garden, I began to see more wildlife visit my home. I began to see more birds, butterflies, and bees. I saw many birds use my fruit trees to eat, worms come up after a heavy rain, and hundreds of bees that swarmed my lime tree when it was flowering. I didn't make the connections at first, but after working in the environmental field, I started to see how all this was connected. I began making the connection that if one thing wasn't there, neither would the other one. I had the impression that not all animals were good to have in your garden, but I struggled with the thought of excluding any wildlife that made its way to my garden. I gardened to grow my own food, to see more animals in my yard, and lastly, I realized that I met more of my neighbors that way. People who passed my home on their walks frequently knocked on my gate and asked if they could try a pomegranate or guava that had fallen from the tree. I always said yes. I knew then that food gardens not only had an impact on wildlife but also on people in my community who wanted to see my plants and try a bite of them. Having a garden, whether native or edible, is a nurturing ground for education, community, and conservation.

Now, I have both native and a food garden because I think it's important to dedicate a space for wildlife and grow my own food. My favorite part about having a garden like this is that I get to see how wildlife interacts with all the plants that are present. I live in Los Angeles in an urban neighborhood, so you would think seeing wildlife would be infrequent. By having a garden it's not! I've seen Cooper's hawks, red-tailed hawks, hooded orioles, and black phoebes all come by looking for a treat. This is why I believe that the start of making an impact in the world begins in our backyard. As humans, we must conserve wildlife because it's been threatened due to our economic growth. Wildlife serves an important role in every ecosystem, so why not welcome it in your garden?

Food gardeners and birders both help play a role in helping the environment. Some birders dedicate their gardens to serve as habitat for the native birds, while other birders both create habitat for birds and grow their own food. Sometimes these groups overlap. Both are significant when it comes to helping their local environment, but they do not often work alongside each other to reach that goal. That time must come.

WHY LOS ANGELES AUDUBON MUST ENGAGE WITH FOOD GARDENERS

Food gardeners are key environmentalists. They help their local environment by minimizing their carbon footprint, create habitat for wildlife, and decrease the effects of food deserts. They take part in an important movement where people are beginning to realize the significance of growing their food. The guerilla gardener Ron Finley said, "growing your own food is like printing your own money." Gardeners are in charge of what goes into their food, unlike store-bought produce that is not always organic, has GMOs, or contain pesticide residue that's harmful to the body. Food gardeners might not have a conservation garden, but they are still participating in environmental conservation by protecting greenspace that's potential habitat to wildlife species. Food gardeners have earned the right to engage with environmental activism, including bird and nature walks with Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Food gardeners notice when new critters come along, especially if they're eating their precious produce; however, this relationship between animals and food is normal, and harsh measures shouldn't be taken to stop



This is the Loquat tree in my garden that many birds and pollinators visit.

this. Some view insects, birds, and small mammals as pests, and therefore do not want them in their gardens. That leads to practices that are harmful to wildlife, like setting traps with rat poison, installing needle plates so birds don't land on their home, or using insecticides on insects so they don't eat the plants. Instead, the aim is to encourage more species and a greater species diversity to ensure natural sustainability for all life forms. This can be done by installing bird feeders, birdbaths, and planting natives, which welcomes more species in a garden. If food gardeners do these simple changes, the biodiversity in gardens will increase thus increasing the health and productivity of the garden itself.

Birders and gardeners have much in common. They appreciate wildlife, require patience, must have some understanding of the wildlife surrounding them, and like to spend time outdoors. By connecting the two groups, the amount of knowledge that can be exchanged can be very helpful. Food gardeners can benefit greatly from understanding how important pollinators are, what plants birds use, or what insects are attracted to which plants. Birders are commonly aware of birds' conservation statuses. This is what motivates them to install seed bird feeders and hummingbird feeders and to plant natives that help their feathery friends. Those who have food gardens do not always have recognition of the species that visit

their gardens. This is why this connection is so important. Gardeners and birders can exchange valuable information with one another, and in the end they both strive for the same goal: a backyard full of a healthy life!

THE INFAMOUS CRITTERS YOU THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SEE IN YOUR GARDEN

Connectivity in a garden is important. It's easy to accept a hummingbird feeding on the nectar from bell-shaped flowers of the pomegranate tree. It's not so easy to accept the relationship between the giant swallowtail caterpillar and a citrus tree: the way in which the swallowtail larvae mimics bird poop on the citrus leaves to avoid predators but also eats its leaves. Though the larvae are often viewed as pests, soon they will become butterflies that will then give back to the garden by pollinating the plants that produce fruit and vegetables. Rabbits are also hard to accept in a garden because they eat up all the flowers and vegetables. Many gardeners will do anything to keep them out, but rabbits are helpful in some ways: one being that rabbit droppings provide nutrients for the soil and can be used as fertilizer to give seeds a nitrogen boost! (ABC Project). Though, in large numbers they can be hurtful to a garden, a safe way to keep them from eating all the food is by installing cages made of chicken wire around the food which does the trick!



My avocado tree that we planted on the sidewalk that used to grow five avocados per year and now grows up to thirty

Grasshoppers also are contributors in providing nutrients to the soil with their excrement but hold a bad rep if seen in a garden. Grasshoppers can pose a threat to a food garden if they are present in large numbers, but a few can be a good sign of helpful diversity. Also don't forget that they serve as food for birds, lizards, spiders, and other arthropods (The Spruce). Again, if they do seem to pose a threat to a garden there are natural solutions like installing mud nest plasters that attract barn swallows, which are insectivores. Another way is by planting horehound, a nonnative to California that is known as the "grasshopper repellent" and as a companion plant, which stimulates and aids fruiting in tomatoes and peppers (National Gardening Association). In addition, natural predators like ladybugs are beneficial to have because they eat crop-destroying aphids. There are many non-lethal "pest" management techniques that can be done if some critters are really not wanted in a garden. Some that have been mentioned are chicken wire, introducing repellent plants, and encouraging natural predators. The intention is to not view wildlife as pests, but rather welcome their company in a garden. If damage is done by any wildlife, there are many ways in which they can be dealt with without using harsh measures.

PLAN OF ACTION

One way to connect to food gardeners is by recognizing the birders and food gardeners who are

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already involved with L.A. Audubon, and then discover if they would be interested in dedicating nature walks to talk about the interrelation between both their gardens. This can inform others about how it is possible to grow food while helping conserve wildlife species. Another way is by connecting with garden managers to plan a visit to a local community garden. Once developing a relationship with garden managers, we could host a bioblitz to identify the many different species that inhabit the garden. During the survey, we could introduce iNaturalist as a tool to identify unknown species. This would welcome gardeners into partaking in community science in their own backyards.

Another idea to connect with gardeners is to have a cooking class where gardeners share knowledge of the health benefits of some foods they grow and creative ways to cook them. We could also have a class about cooking with native plants and how they've been used for years by indigenous people to make tools, medicine, and shelter. Lastly, we could host a birder and food gardener meetup at The Natural History Museum of LA. This place is an excellent example of how both a native and a food garden can grow and flourish in the same location. It's an opportunity for food gardeners and naturalists to coincide and learn from one another, but most importantly encourage one another to welcome new critters in their gardens and implement new ideas for planting.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is often difficult to view all wildlife diversity as a good sign to see in a garden. Biodiversity in a garden is what food gardeners encounter daily and hopefully, over time, will encourage them to actively protect these creatures. Protecting them can look like introducing natives or simply not viewing wildlife as pests. Having a garden that's both native and edible helps a garden become high in species biodiversity and benefits the health of gardeners as well. An article published by The National Park Service (NPS) called "Benefits of Biodiversity in Human Health and Well-being," explains how important biodiversity is to the health and sustainability of all species, including our own. Biodiversity isn't only good for nature. The residents around these green areas experience greater mental health than those who live in areas with less green spaces (Alcock et al. 2017). The more native plants, the more pollinators, the healthier you and your garden are! Helping gardeners make that connection to the food they eat and link it to the pollinator that helped make that possible is the product of promoting engagement with food gardeners. By connecting with garden managers and speaking to the food gardeners involved with L.A. Audubon, there is a chance at beginning a new relationship that's full of everlasting potential, one that can change the gardens of both food gardeners and birders, help wildlife species, and transform the way we look at growing food.

Helpful Resources:

Benefits of birding for permaculture:

<http://tcpermaculture.com/site/2014/06/11/the-benefits-of-birding-for-permaculture/>

Meet the "Gangsta Gardener" Changing South Central Los Angeles With Soil:

<https://www.vogue.com/article/guerrilla-garden-ron-finley-los-angeles-south-central>

Gardening for pollinators:

<https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/gardening.shtml>

Benefits of attracting birds:

<https://www.thespruce.com/benefits-of-attracting-birds-386399>

The real case for saving species: We don't need them but they need us:

<https://e360.yale.edu/features/the-real-case-for-saving-species-we-dont-need-them-but-they-need-us>



California mugwort is a native plant that holds many medicinal properties that can help relieve pain and treat rashes. Right beside it are cilantro plants beginning to sprout!

Benefits of biodiversity to human health and well-being:
https://www.nps.gov/articles/parksciencev31-n1_buttk_eetal-hm.htm

How to control garden damage by grasshoppers:
<https://www.thespruce.com/control-grasshopper-garden-damage-2656303>

All about horehound:
<https://garden.org/ideas/view/wildflowers/191/All-About-Horehound/>

Science talk Wednesdays: Why are birds the gardeners best friend:
<https://www.blogtalkradio.com/herstorytoo/2019/10/02/science-talk-wednesdays-why-are-birds-the-gardeners-best-friend>

This Story Is for the Birds : Attract Feathered Friends to Your Yard With Plants That Provide Food, Cover:
<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-11-03-re-1225-story.html>

Animals in the garden:
<https://sites.berry.edu/abc/animals-in-the-garden/>



This is my pomegranate tree that many hummingbirds visit while it's flowering.

FROM OUR READERS

This is the 2nd issue of the Western Tanager where we are pleased to present the following articles written by you, our readers.

We hope you enjoy the following contributions and we look forward to reading and publishing more of your nature stories.

You are welcome to submit articles and comments to the editorial staff at: susancastor@laaudubon.org and editorwtanager@gmail.com

• **Top Ways To Preserve Nature While Hiking,**
by Rachel Gaffney

• **Photo Essay — India Journal,**
by Rustom Jamadar

• **The Fledgling,** *by Brenda Rees*

• **Owls Nesting in Our Yard,** *by Janice Rayman*

• **Reclaiming Ourselves Through Nature,**
by Danny Humphrey

• **Two Robins in a Birdbath,**
by Janine Soucie Kelley

• **No Sparrows,** *by Annie Margis*

• **Birding Notes from the Ebell Club 1917,**
by Judith Thompson

• **POEM: Ballona Stories,** *by Joyce Karel*

PHOTO ESSAY: India Journal — December 2019

By Rustom Jamadar

The Rann of Kutch is a vast area of salt desert / salt marsh located in the north-west of the Indian State of Gujrat. It borders the Arabian sea on the west, the Indus river delta to the north and stretches east for about 250 miles. It is split into the Great Rann and the Little Rann, somewhat loosely, based on ability to access and administer the vast region. It is arguably the largest salt desert / marshland in the world, covering an area of about 10,000 sq. miles. Desert or marshland?

In the monsoon season it floods and becomes a continuous marshland, then as the water evaporates it leaves behind vast stretches of parched mud-flats dotted with scrub vegetation on “islands” and brackish lakes in basins. I visited the Little Rann, on a birding trip, a few days ago.

Here's some of what I saw.



Typical habitat: Vast stretches of sunbaked mud flats, punctuated by basins of water, dotted with and bordered by acacia-like Babul trees. The bovine is a wild Nilgai, an antelope endemic to India.



This Eurasian / Common Kestrel migrates from its summer home in Europe to winter in India. The vast empty desert seems an unlikely place to winter in, but many migrating birds find refuge here.



This place is also home to the Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary. No, I am not kidding. This is the only place where this endangered mammal still survives.



Another small falcon, the Merlin, made a surprise appearance here. A resident of the northern reaches of Europe and North America, it winters in the southern portions of those continents and in some central parts of Asia. This rarity was a prized find for the Bombay based birders, even more so than the Peregrine Falcon that was sought so fervently. To give you an idea of this “falcon fever”, our group spent three hours roaming the desert to find the Peregrine and the Merlin. How the drivers pick out the specks of these lone birds in this vast empty wilderness is truly amazing; though it is a matter of bragging rights for these guides who operate sans binoculars.



The vast empty flats we roamed to find the falcons, and came across an unexpected little thing. Trying to hide under a wheel of one of our vehicles was this little lone bird. It made no attempt to fly away despite being approached at arm's length by more than a dozen photographers. It did flit about and tried to hide inside our vehicles. We were puzzled, but could see no injury or signs of illness. After ten minutes we did coax it out from underneath the tire but it stayed around another couple of minutes and then took off, flew high up and away. The only explanation I can reach is that it was exhausted from a migratory flight and had to rest and recover. Smart bird, this Zitting Cisticola, taking refuge amongst humans and staying safe from the falcons who would have loved to have it for breakfast. (The bird's name is amusing; it sounds like a disease - a cyst one gets from sitting too long.)

For a desert, the Little Rann is surprisingly full of life. A Desert Wheatear, another seasonal migrant, feeds on insects it finds in the cracked mud, as do the trio below.



There are three species in this frame; from L to R, Kentish Plover, Little Stint, Lesser Sand Plover.



The stands of the Babul tree harbor many species, native and migrant. This migrant, a McQueen's Bustard, led us on a chase before allowing us to photograph it.



This Black Drongo brazenly stole a morsel of meat from under the beak of the much larger eagle. The Drongos were fearless little devils, chasing away Harriers, Eagles and Owls. Gangsters!



There is obviously food here for birds of prey. The desert attracts not just small falcons, but also large eagles such as the Imperial Eagle, which was feeding on a kill.



These resident Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse simply disappeared into the dry brush.



This Common Greenshank caught a fish, which it had to let go because it was too large to gobble.



The Black-winged Stilt looks so elegant.



The stretches of shallow water attract hundreds of Pelicans, Flamingos, Avocets, Storks, Egrets and many other waders. Great White / Rosy Pelicans, Egrets, Black-headed Ibis



Hundreds of Lesser Flamingos mix in with dozens of Greater Flamingos.



Sunset over the Little Rann of Kutch

Common Crane are seen in flocks or in family trios – parents with a young bird. Dozens of larks thrust their beaks in the dirt, finding food, no doubt. This seemingly barren land is full of life. At the edges of the Rann are human settlements – villages with cultivation. There is more life there, which I will portray in the next chapter. For now, I bid you “Good evening!” 🐦

The Fledgling

By Brenda Rees



Fledgling Band-Tailed Pigeon | Photo Courtesy of:
www.flickr.com/photos/treebeard/

The grayish brownish thing I discovered underneath the salvia in the backyard garden made me hold my breath for weeks.

I discovered this hidden thing about four years ago around the end of April. A jerky movement at the top terrace caught my eye. Squatting down sumo-style, I gingerly lifted the leaves. All right, what are you? I was face-to-beak with a baby bird. The bird froze and I immediately let go of the leaves.

Oh great. Just great.

I knew the drill. Since this was a fledgling, I would leave it to see if mama came to tend to it. But my worry was cats. Strays and neighbor's cats often wandered through our Eagle Rock backyard. Could this fluffy fledge survive? Could I survive? And just what kind of fledgling is this?

That answer came to me that dusk when mama arrived, first landing on the wires above. A band-tailed pigeon, she bobbed her head left and right, scoping out the territory. Down she swooped. She regurgitated god-only-knows-what to her baby that hungrily accepted the meal. Après dinner, the pair sat side-by-side for a spell. One could imagine the conversation: "Any trouble?" "Well, the big human looked at me."

"Did you remain calm and still?" "Yes." "Very good. Cats bothering you?" "What's a cat?" "You'll know it when it rips you apart."

This exchange happened like clockwork for a few days.

One day, however, I noticed "Fledgy," was up on the concrete wall. This 8-foot-tall concrete barrier was used regularly by scampering squirrels and ... (shudder) cats. Low-hanging tree limbs dangled above the wall which could provide a quick escape flight. I was impressed Fledgy was able to rise to occasion. At least now off the ground, there was a flying chance to stay alive.

Again, Mama BT repeated her evening feedings and wall time. In just a matter of days, Fledgy was noticeable bigger with adult feathers poking through; its neck extending longer and sleeker.

The morning I went to bring in the laundry – which stayed on the line overnight because I was lazy – my heart dropped. Fledgy was not on the wall. I looked at all the possible points it could have flown to. Nothing. Internal tears. Oh well. It was nice viewing while it lasted. Can't control these things.

I was unclipping the shirts...and what? What??? Here was Fledgy calmly squeezed into a pair of underwear. I backed away not wanting to startle the now-big bird with a silent gaze. The laundry was going to stay on the line for a few MORE days.

And yes, Mama BT perched on the clothesline for evening meals. White bird poop splattered on not just underwear but on nearby laundry items.

After a few days, we realized Mama BT wasn't coming every night. A sign? Sure enough, one day Fledgy was out of his makeshift nest. Up high in our neighbor's oak tree, we saw two-band tailed figures on a branch. *"You made it." "Yes." "Well done. There's a big bunch of your relatives that hang out on wires down that way. It's a good time. Follow me!"*

With that sighting, I emotionally and physically exhaled – and I could finally bring in the laundry. 🐦

Owls Nesting in Our Yard

By Janice Rayman

One evening in mid-May, two friends and I were sitting on our front porch (with masks and social distancing) after an evening hike. Their musicians' ears heard owls! The next day I started looking for them at dawn and dusk. Then, in the middle of the following day I saw a head sticking out of the old nesting box I had built for an acorn woodpecker which my husband, Marc, and I rescued from a downed tree six years ago. We mounted the box 26 feet high in the silver maple by our front porch. Marc, who always has his camera with him, looked with the telephoto lens and it was a little owl! (See photo 1.)



That evening Kathy Linowski, a casual, but long-time birder, joined me on the porch. Minutes after she arrived, but before it turned dark, we could hear their calls and see little owl shapes hovering briefly in front of the nesting box. Kathy said they were feeding the young. From Marc's photos she identified them as western screech owls (*Megascops kennicottii*). These owls, only around eight inches high as adults, eat mostly insects and bats, which they catch in the air. We had a lovely time listening to their calls. She said that, although the owls are fairly common, it is very rare for someone to have owls nesting close by and that I was very lucky.

Early next morning, when we didn't have noises from cars and neighbors, I recorded the owls' calls. Kathy was thrilled. On another

morning she heard them for real. Before she had cataract surgery, she was reduced to birding by ear and had gotten quite good at it. Now, in the dark, she was birding by ear again. We wrapped up in electric blankets because it was cold at 4 am. Marc and I sat on the porch and enjoyed owl calls until late in the night. You could only see the owls for a few minutes before it got too dark to see anything, but those few minutes were wonderful.

So, that started a pattern for me: up at 4 am to watch and listen for owls and again in the evening until 11. I missed some sleep, but am glad I did it. All too soon, Marc found that both owlets had flown from the nest box to a nearby branch. (See photo 2.) The owlets sat on the same branch all day, sometimes sleeping, several times enduring being mobbed by multiple species of songbirds.

When evening came, they flew into a nearby tree. I could hear but not see them there the next morning. After that, we never saw them again. Kathy's research revealed that the parents were teaching them to hunt elsewhere.

Western screechers often mate for life and, if they like a nesting site, they will return there year after year. Next year we will be ready with a rented telephoto night-vision scope. 🦉

—Janice Rayman
(A new member of the LA Audubon Society)



Reclaiming Ourselves Through Nature

By Danny Humphrey

“To be awake is to be alive.”
– Henry David Thoreau

Las Virgenes Trail

I still remember the first day I truly found the wilderness. It was a cool day in July, a rarity for the desert of Los Angeles I call home. I had woken up early that day to go running with some friends, a favorite pastime of mine; our destination was a patch of open space just outside the valley. A long car ride later, I set foot on the Las Virgenes Trail, a rather beloved cat track that led through the open space preserve, eventually connecting with another trail far out into the next county. I didn't go very far that day – I have done so since and the beauty of it astounded me no less than what I describe now – but as the dirt trail slowly got narrower, the birdsong around me grew louder and the smell of truly fresh air filled my gasping lungs. My watering eyes saw no more city. I had finally, after years, arrived on Earth.

The outside world, the urban sprawl of mankind, seems to me based around the idea of bending the natural to man's will, whereas once you leave that, once you enter the last bits of open, untouched space in the city, you find an entirely different idea of humanity's place on Earth. That day as I ran, I saw things I thought only to exist in post-apocalyptic fiction. Rusted water silos from

the planning of settlements cut short by new environmental laws dotted the yellow landscape of dead grass. Fields of dead grass are to this day one of the most jaw-dropping sights my eyes have beheld. I mused for a while about what the Native Americans must have thought about the environment I saw, if they had even paid it any special mind. After all, they saw it every day; the natives were as much a part of the ecosystem as the grass was when the Spanish came. As I stood there I realized the rather beautiful idea that brought me to write this today. Nature is the great reclamer. Once one leaves the confines of the artificial we lock our minds in and sees for themselves the rust on

what was once a part of society we realize how temporary our existence is. Seeing a Western Scrub Jay perched atop a rusted silo has a meaning to me I still cannot describe.

By keeping our minds indoors, we keep our souls restrained to the power of places like that. And by keeping ourselves restrained in the house or apartment, unexposed to the outdoors, we are by definition keeping our minds from getting out. I can sit here all day recounting the beauty I experienced by simply leaving civilization for an hour and then returning to exist in the machine we made from the god, but I would rather experience it again. Nature, as well as being the great reclamer, is the best means by which we can reclaim ourselves. Without it, we are merely asleep and dreaming. 🐦

I am a student writer in Los Angeles. I like to write short stories and essays about my experiences in nature, as well as being a human in the modern world. —Danny

Two Robins In a Birdbath

By Janine Soucie Kelley



Not exotica that you would grab your bins, rev-up your SUV and drive across three states to observe, beaming with pride as you record its sighting and count on eBird. Rather the robin is a friendly bird, more like a next-door neighbor.

You won't have to trek to the Amazon or Patagonia to see a robin, though once-in-a-lifetime trips like those are inked on many a bucket list. No. You will spy the robin in Ponderosa pine forests, urban landscapes and grassy lawns pecking the ground for earthworms. Her nest is made of mud, her eggs an eponymous and beautiful blue that you just might decide is the perfect color for your kitchen.

During the COVID-19 shelter-in-place mandate, the robin has taught me a thing or two about how to live in the present moment. Its long, liquid whistle wakes me at 4 a.m. — a few hours too early even though I too am an early riser. If the early bird catches the worm, the

robin without a doubt catches the most!

Its whistle teaches me to begin my day with song instead of groaning about how long the lines at Trader Joe's might be or worrying if there will be toilet paper on the shelves. So I nest into my pillow and just enjoy the robin's melody instead of mentally checking the day's impossible to-do list. The robin reminds me that I'm a human being, not a human doing. And I delight in the beginning of the day before logging onto my computer and classes. I even hum a little.

Taking a break from a DIY plumbing project a few weeks ago, I squeezed two fresh lemonades stirring in sugar, Pellegrino and ice cubes, topping my frosty glass with homegrown strawberry mint before heading to the front porch. I sat in my comfy wicker rocker to enjoy the summer day, the soft breeze, the sunshine and some front-yard birding. To my delight, I spotted a robin in my turquoise birdbath set beneath two cottonwood trees; the intertwining branches looked like a couple holding hands.

The robin is never dressed for prom or a wedding. She doesn't dazzle like the hot pink flamingos at the Los Angeles Zoo or show off like peacocks strutting their super-model stuff on a Dior runway or invite mystery like the masked Bohemian waxwing that blushes peach. No, the robin always wears her rust-orange vest paired with sensible gray wings, yellow beak and zombie-white eye shadow.

Its mate soon joined the robin in the birdbath. Together, they sat content in the cool water resting perhaps from a day's foraging for their fledglings. They bobbed their heads and tails again and again, fluffing and splashing water underneath their wings, enjoying their bath before hopping onto the rim to dry their feathers in the sun. Then they flew up onto a branch of a welcoming poplar.

Two ordinary robins in a birdbath have taught me to welcome each day, to be wholly in the present moment and to fully enjoy what I am doing instead of rushing off to the next project. They reminded me that what's close to home is always important. And something as ordinary as a bath can be quite delightful — especially when shared with someone you love. 🐦

No Sparrows

By Annie Margis



Being visited by wild birds while working in my outdoor office is an invigorating momentary distraction from my labors. Every morning before I plug in on the patio table, I open my rodent-proof bird food container and scoop out seeds. nyjer for the goldfinches, corn for the sparrows, black sunflower seeds for the mockingbirds, suet for whatever bird comes to call, plus sugar-water for the hummingbirds.

I once saw an oriole on the telephone pole in the alley behind my garden, and an owl once swooped over my head as I sat on the porch. I saw an egret in my pond one morning. As I came around the corner, it flew up like a massive white paper kite. One afternoon, a red-tailed hawk landed in my yard like a body thrown from a plane. It was enormous.

For years, I've seen sparrows by the flock on my feeders, in my trees, on my back yard furniture, even bathing in my waterfall. Different kinds of sparrows: sparrows with white stripes on the crowns of their heads and the black-capped ones that pull on my heartstrings, the sparrows I've loved since childhood.

I haven't left this garden since the lockdown began. I work out here in my outdoor office, eat and even nap outside. I watch the light change from dawn to noon to dusk, and I'm certain about what I'm going to say: The birds are gone.

No sparrows visit me anymore. I still see crows on the street, but they never enter my yard, even though I scatter peanuts. A pair of goldfinches still comes for their nyjer, but no mockingbirds, no scrub jays, no mourning doves. I'm devastatingly lonely without them.

I haven't been out of the house to walk around and see if there are still sparrows at McDonalds and seagulls on the beach, so I don't know. My Zoom friends reassure me that lots of birds of all kinds still visit their yards, so maybe it's just me. But why?

I wrote to Cornell University's bird lab and asked what might have happened, and they kindly sent me back a pamphlet on "Why birds leave backyards." Apparently I'm not the first abandoned foster mother to ask why. The reasons are numerous, and some can be addressed. For one, I can discourage the neighbor's cat from hanging out with me in the yard, although I'll miss her.

News Flash: Yesterday, not one pair of sparrows, but **two** pairs of sparrows showed up at my corn-filled feeder. I may have cried a little. I'm going to keep putting out bird seed, even if the squirrels do eat most of it, on the chance that sparrows may have returned for good. Maybe now that the lockdowns are lifting, the birds are ending their vacations in the people-less parks, and coming home. 🐦

Birding Notes from the Ebell Club, 1917

Transcript created from handwritten Ebell Club notes by Judith Thompson in the spring of 2020

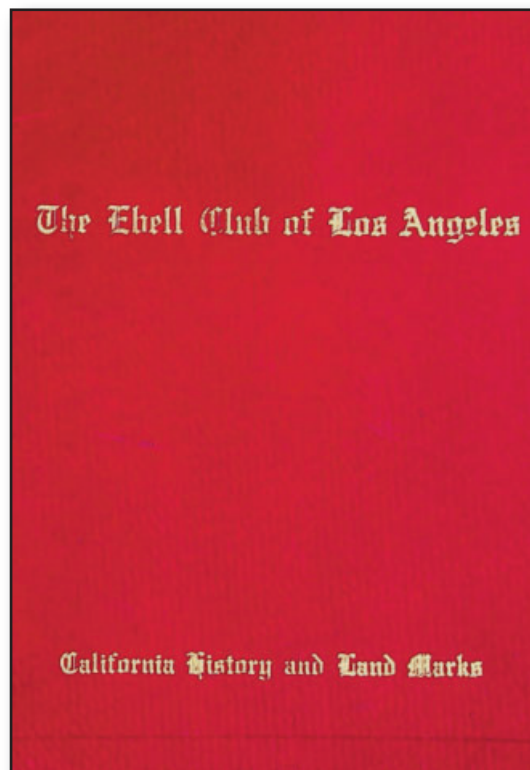
The Ebell Club, founded in 1894, is now located on Wilshire Blvd at Lucerne in a lovely building opened in 1927. The delightful passage below appeared in "department", or learning group, hand-penned notes from 1917. It is relevant even today with regard to birds.

The regular meeting of the department of California History and Landmarks [of the Ebell Club] met on April 26 [1917] ...

Miss Phillipson introduced Mrs. Harriet Myers, secretary of the Audubon Society and chairman of the Department of Birds, Wildlife and Flowers of the General and State Federations [of Women's Clubs]. Her subject was California birds.

A great deal of bird work has been done in California this year by the Audubon Society, a film, "THE SPIRIT OF AUDUBON", and many lantern slides being used by lecturers, who try especially to reach the children. The members of the women's clubs are asked to act as game wardens and report any destruction of bird life. The shrike, linnet, California jay and English sparrow are the only small birds not protected by law, except in districts one, two and three where the blackbirds are unprotected. There have been many fights in the legislature to protect the

meadow lark, which does some damage, but is a very valuable insect eater.



Twenty nine varieties eat the black scale. Swallows destroy the cotton boll weevil. Orioles eat some fruit but do much more good by destroying the worms in the orchards. Mrs. Myers showed colored pictures of many of the best known California birds, and concluded by giving an original poem "A Toast to the Birds".

Mrs. S. J. Keese gave a sketch of the sixth mission - San Francisco de Asis, founded October 1776 on the Laguna Dolores, and best known as Dolores because of confusion with San Francisco Solano at Sonoma. Dolores was not very successful at first as the Indians had been driven away by enemies and the building materials were poor. Mrs. Keese closed by quoting Bret Hart's "Angelus" dedicated to the bells of Dolores.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Edith M. Benton
Secretary

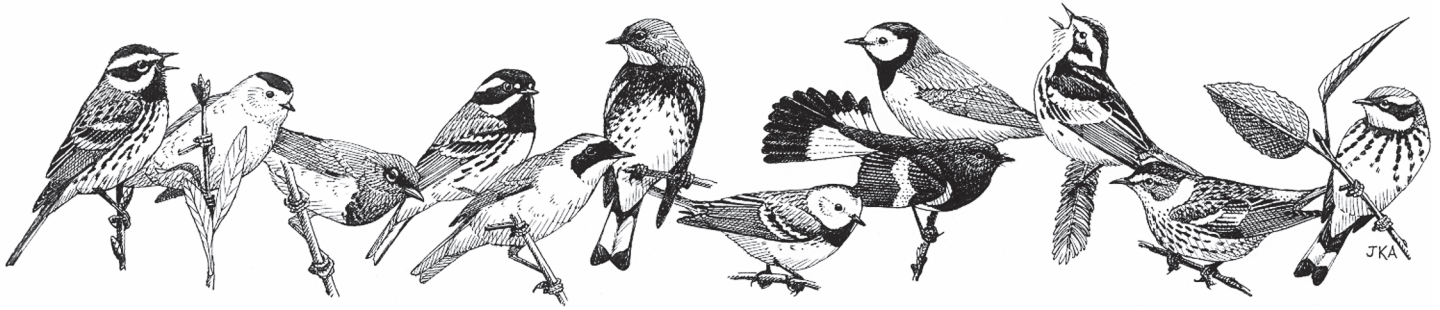
Mrs. Myers spoke of the desirability of licensing cats, saying it was the stray cats that did the most damage to birds.

There are over 500 different birds in California, nearly all of them of great value as destroyers of insect life.

Twenty-nine varieties eat the black scale. Swallows destroy the cotton boll weevil. Orioles eat some fruit but do much more good by destroying the worms in the orchards. Mrs. Myers showed colored pictures of many of the best-known California birds, and concluded by giving an original poem "A Toast to the Birds".

This note followed in the minutes of the next meeting of the department. Look up the lovely song:

The regular meeting of the department of California History and Landmarks was held Thursday May 11, [1917] Miss Phillipson presiding. After the reading of the minutes, Miss Hynes played the Brahms Intermezzo and "Hark! Hark! The Lark" by Schubert-Liszt.



BIRDS OF THE SEASON — June 2020 | By Jon Fisher

The latter half of April saw the passage of large numbers of passerines and other migrants. Within a few weeks, this movement began to wane significantly. Often, the upside to this slowdown is the appearance eastern vagrants, and a satisfying variety of these did show up this year. Though most vagrants are never seen by birders, the increasing army of observers in the county ensure that a greater percentage are detected.

There were remarkable movements of western migrants through Bear Divide in the western San Gabriel Mountains. This location is unique in that it is the terminus of a long wide canyon that funnels migrants to a low divide. Birds take the flight path of least resistance and observations easily made, often at or below eye level. In late April, mornings of birding there produced up to 13,000 individuals.

The impressive numbers of birds were made up of a variety of vireos, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, thrushes and others. As this spot is readily accessible by car, it attracted quite a few interested birders. There are certainly other similar spots in our local mountains that funnel migrants, but access is problematic; limited largely by the extent of public roads.

Another interesting phenomenon occurred this spring, as it did back in 1992. California saw a spring invasion of typically southeastern passerines. This year there were Yellow-throated Vireos (six recorded), Kentucky Warblers (a half dozen), Hooded Warblers (about a dozen) and Northern Parulas (over two dozen) among them. Los Angeles County saw few of these birds, but did garner its share of parulas.

Nearly as interesting as the vagrants are the potential or confirmed breeding records of scarce, unusual and local species. Finding these can add some fun to what is otherwise generally a slow pe-

riod following spring migration. Black Swifts, Northern Parulas and Summer Tanagers figured into that equation this year.

While there were no new records this spring, species recently increasing in the county- including American Oystercatcher, Neotropic Comorant and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron- continued in small numbers.

Two **Common Mergansers** at Castaic Lake on May 11 (Jane Stavert) and one in San Gabriel Canyon above Azusa on May 25 (Luke Tiller) may be indicative of local breeding, as has been documented in recent years.

The tiny population of **Inca Doves** in Lake Los Angeles in the east Antelope Valley continues, with at least two birds present there from May 16–June 6 (Kimball Garrett). A few **Common Ground-Doves** continued along the San Gabriel River in Bellflower with as many as three being reported through June 17.

From one to three **Black Swifts** were seen intermittently above Claremont Wilderness Park and Palmer Canyon from May 21–June 19 (Tom Miko, Chris Dean). Breeding undoubtedly takes place in the area, with nest sites often being located behind waterfalls.

Late inland **Common Loons** were at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on May 5 (Kiera Carvalho), over Diamond Bar on May 10 (Keith Condon) and at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on May 15 (Rod Higbie).

Up to three **American Oystercatchers** continued off and on at Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro through June 18.

Rare inland was a **Heermann's Gull** at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on May 24 (Michael San Miguel). What may have been the same bird flew over Peck Road Park in Arcadia on June 1 (Jon Fisher).

A few **Glaucous-winged Gulls** were noted late in the season, with single birds at Franklin Canyon Park on May 3 (Calvin Bonn), one near downtown Los Angeles on May 6 (Brad Rumble) and up to three along the LA River in the Maywood area on May 10, with one lingering as late as June 17 likely to summer locally (Richard Barth, Brad Rumble).

Neotropic Cormorants included a continuing bird at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale through April 27, one at MacArthur Park on April 29 (Brad Rumble) and two at the spreading basins below Hansen Dam near Lake View Terrace from May 3-7 (Brad Rumble).

Up to eight **American White Pelicans** were late on the Los Angeles River in Long Beach from May 21–31, with one still there through June 18 (Kim & Jeff Moore).

Yellow-crowned Night-Herons included at least one continuing in the Playa del Rey area through May 30 and up to two at Sims Bio Pond in Long Beach from May 25–June 13 (Becky Turley).

A **California Condor** was northwest of Castaic Lake on April 28 (Aaron Kreisberg) and two were above Echo Mountain above Altadena on June 19 (Molly Hill). The continuing **Zone-tailed Hawk** in Monrovia was reported through May 11.

The wintering **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** at Heartwell Park in Lakewood remained through May 4.

Lingering wintering **Tropical Kingbirds** were at El Dorado Park in Long Beach through May 13 and at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City through May 16. A nice find at Apollo Park near Lancaster was an **Eastern Kingbird** observed on June 6 (Becky Kitto).

Red-eyed Vireos were at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City from May 11–13 (Bobby Trusella), in Juniper Hills in the Antelope Valley on May 31 (Kimball Garrett) and near Big Santa Anita Canyon above Arcadia on June 19 (Darren Dowell).

Purple Martins, always a scarce migrant, were nearly missed entirely this spring with just two recorded at the Val Verde landfill near Santa Clarita on June 6 (Stephen Myers).

A very late **Hermit Thrush** was at Apollo Park near Lancaster from May 25–June 12 (Mark & Janet Scheel). Even more interesting were at least six singing birds in the vicinity of Sturtevant Camp in the mountains above Arcadia on June 19 (Darren

Dowell). Several were recorded here last spring and summer and breeding seems possible, if not likely.

Rancho Sierra Golf Course in the east Antelope Valley hosted a rare **Gray Catbird** on May 31 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

A late *gambelii* **White-crowned Sparrow**—our expected wintering subspecies—was in La Canada on May 26 (Mark Hunter), while a **White-throated Sparrow** continuing at Crescenta Valley Park in La Crescenta through April 23 was the only one recorded during the period, though a number of others were in the area over the winter and well into spring.

Turning our attention to warblers, nine “vagrant” species were discovered between late April and late June in addition to our regular western types. A **Northern Waterthrush** was at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia on June 5 (Dessi Seiburth), a **Black-and-white Warbler** was at Buckhorn Campground in the San Gabriel Mountains on June 9 (Dessi Seiburth) and a **Tennessee Warbler** was found at Madrona Marsh in Torrance from May 19–20.

American Redstarts were at Rancho Sierra Golf Course in the east Antelope Valley from May 16–17 (Kimball Garrett), along the Playa Vista Riparian Corridor from June 11–12 (Sage Bylin) and at Blaisdell Park in Claremont on June 12 (Dan Stoebel).

Northern Parulas were at Rancho Sierra Golf Course on May 23 (David Bell), at Meadows Park in Claremont on June 3 (Dave Smith), along Little Rock Creek on June 5 (Kimball Garrett) and in Soledad Canyon on June 5 (Naresh Satyan), with a pair present there from June 6–7 (Andrew Birch). The discovery of a pair in suitable habitat makes local breeding very possible. Bringing up the rear was one at Ernie Howlett Park in Rolling Hills Estates from June 16–20.

Two **Magnolia Warblers** were together in the east Antelope Valley on June 9 (Joseph Dunn) and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was in Beverly Hills on May 13 (Scott Logan)

A **Palm Warbler** was found at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on April 24 (Darren Dowell) and the continuing **Grace’s Warbler** continued at Charlton Flat in the San Gabriel Mountains through June 12. The latter bird has been present since April 16 and was also at this locale in the spring of

2019. Charlton Flat is no stranger to vagrant southwestern warblers; long time county birders will recall the Red-faced Warbler that showed up here in June of 1978. A handful of other vagrant warblers have turned up over the years as well.


A singing male **Wilson's Warbler** along Little Rock Creek on June 9 indicated a potential for breeding in this area (Kimball Garrett).

Ten **Summer Tanagers** were recorded during the period, with the most noteworthy being potential breeding birds. A pair was at Pearblossom Park in the Antelope Valley from May 19–June 20 (Kimball Garrett, Kelsey Reckling) and one to two singing males were along Big Rock Creek on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains from May 22–June 18 (Kimball Garrett).

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were at Malaga Dunes on the Palos Verdes Peninsula from May 27–28 (Jonathan Nakai), in Glendora on June 7 (Andrew Hulm) and at Cloudburst Summit in the San Gabriel Mountains on June 13 (Merryl Edelstein).

Now that spring migration has concluded and much of breeding season is also behind us, we turn our attention to fall migration. The first southbound shorebirds—Wilson's Phalaropes, as expected—were recorded by mid-June. By early July the numbers and variety will have increased and continue to do so for another month or so.

Unfortunately, as of this writing, the Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base—one of the premier shorebirding spots in the county—remain closed to entry. But there are still many other places to watch shorebirds. The lower Los Angeles River is always excellent, and Malibu Lagoon and the Ballona Wetlands offer good opportunities as well. In addition, there are many other spots along the San Gabriel River, the Los Angeles River and even the Rio Hondo that are worth birding.

The game will truly be on in August when passerines begin heading south through the mountains and to a lesser extent in the lowlands. The summer months will be uncomfortably hot, but the rewards of birding during this period can help make up for that. 

BALLONA STORIES - A POEM

We often hear stories and tidbits from the lives of our young nature adventurers while they are on our field trips to Ballona and Kenneth Hahn. Below is a poem written by long-time ace volunteer Joyce Karel about some of the secrets that have been shared with her.

These wetlands tours with students
Me telling stories of plants, birds, animals
Them telling stories of fears about snakes,
Sand in their shoes. Bugs that bite.

I love being with these children
As they change on these walks
Joyfully pointing out gopher holes, ladybugs,
egrets
Rushing to show me shells
Shouting "Stop and look" to watch swallows
darting after insects.

Trusting me to answer questions
Listen to their darker stories of being left at the zoo
Lost in department stores, separated from families
Not knowing how to ask for help
Stories their teachers might not know.

Now they're glowing in delight
Seeing there's a path to follow
Looking forward to what might be ahead
Thanking me for "making them love nature".
Feeling safe enough to trust their own wings.

—By Joyce Karel

Los Angeles Audubon Society

Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Awards 2020

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The 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 with limited or no access to major granting agencies 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. Between \$1500 and \$5000 are awarded each year. One or more awards will be given out in 2020.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

The application deadline for the 2020 Research Award is September 1, 2020; grants will be awarded in November 2020.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Awards will be given to students and amateur ornithologists, who are not able to secure research funding through channels available to professional ornithologists. Applicants should reside in or attend school in southern California [San Luis Obispo, Kern, and San Bernardino Counties and south, and adjacent areas (at the discretion of the Awards Committee)]. Awards will be given for ornithologically-oriented research, which may be conducted anywhere. While we have taken a more favorable consideration of research that is of a local nature involving local species, 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 this year. The maximum individual award is \$1500.

Applications must include the following information:

- 1) A cover sheet giving: applicant's name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number; title of the project; amount requested; and project's proposed starting and completion date.
- 2) A short abstract of the proposed research, approximately 200 words.
- 3) An explicit description of the QUESTION posed by the research, the SIGNIFICANCE of the question, the METHODS of data collection and analysis to be employed, and the JUSTIFICATION of these methods with appropriate literature citations. The body of the proposal must not exceed five double-spaced typed pages.
- 4) A budget and budget justification.
- 5) A curriculum vitae, including a list of the applicant's publications and papers in press, if any.
- 6) A description of recent, current and pending research support.
- 7) Letter(s) of recommendation from an Advisor (and/or other persons) in the field of Biology.
- 8) Provide a copy of all pertinent permits (collecting, banding, tissue or blood sampling, etc) associated with your research for all jurisdictions (state(s), federal, foreign countries), as well as documentation for the deposition of specimens (museums, universities). Certify that you will comply with the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) regulations of his/her home institution. In some cases, the entire permit need not be submitted; just the pertinent title pages and page showing permittee and his/her advisor(s).
- 9) ALL MATERIAL WILL BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY TO THE GRANTS CHAIRPERSON (BELOW). The only item(s) that may be submitted as hard copies to the address below is(are) the letter of recommendation, if the author request privacy.

Los Angeles Audubon Society (LAAS) asks the following from award recipients:

- An accounting of expenditures within six months of completion of the funded project.
- A summary of the project and results obtained suitable for publication in the *Western Tanager*, the chapter newsletter of LAAS, within six months of completion of the funded project.
- An acknowledgment of receipt of the LAAS award in any publication, paper or thesis resulting from research funded in part or full by the award.
- A printed copy of any publication, paper or thesis resulting from the funded research.
- LAAS encourages award recipients to present a program at a membership meeting and/or write an article for the *Western Tanager*.

HOW TO APPLY

Submit the complete application materials ELECTRONICALLY to email address below **no later than September 1, 2020**. The award for the year 2020 will be awarded in November 2020.

For questions, please email Ryan Harrigan: iluvsa@ucla.edu

Sincerely,

Ryan J. Harrigan
Grants Committee Chairman
Los Angeles Audubon Society



MAILING ADDRESS (for private letters of recommendation only)

Ryan Harrigan, Grants Committee Chairman, @ Institute for the Environment and Sustainability, UCLA, La Kretz Hall, Suite 300, Box 951496, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1496