



Phainopepla

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Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic our General Membership Meetings have moved online. Check our website, www.sfvaudubon.org for the latest information.

General Membership Meeting : Meet the Birds *— Zoom Presentation —*

General Membership Meetings

For the foreseeable future, our in-person General Membership Meetings have been placed on hold. Please join us for our online presentations from the comfort of your home! We look forward to the day we can gather safely together and share our love of birds.

Please remember to VOTE on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3.

Stay Safe

&

Happy Birding!

Thursday, October 22, 2020

5:00—6:00 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Steve Kaye

Join us for an enjoyable photo experience that celebrates the beauty in Nature. You'll see uncommon views of birds, learn a bit about birds, and discover how you make a difference. Professional photographer Steve Kaye will show his photos and tell provocative stories about the photos.



This is an excellent program for anyone who wants to know more about birds. And it's a wonderful reminder of the extraordinary beauty that we have outdoors. If you have yet to attend a meeting, this program is for you.

Steve Kaye has been taking photos casually since 1965 and professionally since 2010. Now he uses his photos in presentations and articles to inspire respect for Nature. He

has spoken at photo clubs, judged photo contests, and conducted classes on Nature Photography. Two of his photos appear in *Woodpeckers of North America*, by Stephen A. Shunk (published May 2016).

Find more than 600 photos, 135 blog posts, and dozens of articles at: www.stevekaye.com.

If you're interested in joining our Zoom meeting and enjoying Steve's presentation, please contact us at info@sfvaudubon.org and we'll send you a link to the meeting. The link will not be active until a few minutes before the start of the meeting. See you there!



AFTER THE FIRE by Paula Orlovich



The day I have anticipated and dreaded has occurred. A fire broke out in the basin on September 6 at about 1:00 pm. I could see the smoke from Sherman Oaks and I knew its location before I confirmed with Marianne and Richard Davis. They had driven to the basin and watched as the fire grew rapidly in scope and size. Word on the street was that the fire had been contained to a six-acre area, but when I heard from Pat Bates the next morning, she estimated more like 100 acres burned. We met up and walked the reserve from Woodley all the way east to where the park joins up below the 405 FWY. I could see the blackened earth west of Haskell Creek and as we walked across the smoldering bridge closest to Burbank and into the Reserve. The extent of the devastation was obvious. There are still some trees, some bushes – the fire obviously jumped around a lot. But make no mistake—the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve is badly, badly damaged.



As Chair of the Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program it was hard for me to absorb the loss of opportunity for school children to participate in our outdoor programming, with its wonderfully rich diversity of plants and wildlife. It was painful to see the small group of lesser goldfinches perched on a dead bush, and the animals that had been outrun by the fire that perished. I

thought about Muriel Kotin and all those involved with our chapter and the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Consortium who have dedicated their time to the establishment and maintenance of the reserve over the past 20 plus years. There have been too many losses this year and this is one more.



But what's done is done. I am now beginning to think of resilience. As we all process this loss, hopefully we'll begin to see opportunity amid the ashes. We and our colleagues can, if we want, be the knowledgeable and persuasive agents of change and progress. The Reserve can come back with fewer invasive species and more carefully planned features to increase the benefit that our students –



– and we ourselves – can derive from a reborn ecosystem. There is a lot of work ahead of us and we will need to draw on all our resources as we move forward. 🐦

A Brief History of the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve and Citizen Involvement

(Written by Muriel Kotin, updated 3/2020)



BEFORE

The land in the Sepulveda Basin was used as farmland since the 1800s, before and after the Sepulveda Dam was built around 1940 to control floods. Following devastating floods in the Los Angeles Region, the US Army Corps of Engineers bought about 2.5 square miles that are now the Sepulveda Flood Control Basin in the late 1930s. They also purchased land where they built Hansen Dam, Devil's Gate Dam and several other dams along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries.

The history of the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve (or "Area") starts with the Sylmar Earthquake of 1971. In the earthquake the Lower Van Norman Dam at the LA Reservoir in the mountains to the north cracked. Clay soil was taken from Sepulveda Basin farmland to patch the cracked dam, leaving borrow pits. These filled with water in the rainy season, attracting large numbers of shorebirds. Local citizens observed this and began pushing for a permanent lake and wildlife reserve.

Politicians and agencies listened. In 1979 the US Army Corps of Engineers which owns the entire Sepulveda Basin established the 48-acre riparian area south of Burbank Blvd. between the dam and The Los Angeles River. A pothole pond was dug and filled with water in 1985 to test whether the local soil could reliably hold water. The area was planted by the Corps who directed many volunteers who planted California native plants on the Burbank Boulevard berm.

The pothole pond worked. In 1988 the 60-acre habitat north of Burbank Blvd. between the dam and Haskell Creek was formally established. This was a joint effort of the Army Corps and City of LA as well as other agencies. The informal group of citizens from interested environmental organizations became a formal citizen advisory council. The Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee was formed and is still active.



AFTER

In developing the habitat in 1988, the wildlife lake was graded. The area was planted with native annuals, shrubs, and trees. Pathways were created. The city filled the lake for the fall and winter with drinking water for a few years until a drought caused a water shortage. Then the city refused to fill the lake. So, volunteers held a press event where they poured water from buckets they brought from home. The next day the mayor announced that the lake would be filled.

Reclaimed water from the nearby Tillman Water Reclamation Plant became available in 1992. Since then the lake and Haskell Creek have been supplied with water year round.

The Steering Committee and other citizens began pushing to expand the Wildlife Reserve and to protect and improve the riparian corridors throughout Sepulveda Basin. In 1998 a major expansion project added 60 more acres west of Haskell Creek, east of Woodley Ave. It built the educational staging area, amphitheater and new pedestrian bridges, improved viewing areas and pathways, improved the creek, and added more native plantings and informational signs.

There have been setbacks. Starting in 1998 the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve extended for 225 acres. The updated Sepulveda Basin Master Plan of September 2011 changed the designation of the original 48-acre Wildlife Area, which is south of Burbank Boulevard, to "Project Operations." It removed other land previously designated as Wildlife Area that had served as a buffer from other land uses. This change of designation was followed in December 2012 by sudden devastation of what had been the South Wildlife Reserve (the original Wildlife Area) by the Army Corps of Engineers. They closed the South Reserve to the public. The public pushed back and the closure quickly ended. With time nature has begun to heal the area, although weeds have been able to invade. The long awaited "Vegetative Management Plan" for the former South Reserve was released in late 2017. The management plan incorporates many suggestions from the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee and will allow it to continue function much as a Wildlife Reserve, but without the pothole pond.



COMING HOME

Despite the reduction in its size, the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve is one of the country's finest refuges of its kind within a major urban area. It serves not only as a restored natural habitat for wildlife but as a living laboratory for all to enjoy. The Steering Committee continues its oversight. Member organizations organize creek cleanups and weeding and planting projects. They

lead public hikes and walks here. The Audubon Society and Resource Conservation District lead thousands of school children on nature walks here. Classes from local colleges and universities tour this special place.

Calendar of Events

October–November

At this time, all SF Valley Audubon walks have been cancelled for *October* and *November*.

If walks are made possible, they will be listed on our website.

Thursday, October 22. Zoom General Membership Meeting. 5:00—6:00 p.m. Meet The Birds. Speaker: Steve Kaye. Join us online for a photo adventure of birds and nature with professional photographer, Steve Kaye. If you're interested in joining our Zoom

meeting and enjoying Steve's presentation, please contact us at info@sfvaudubon.org and we'll send you a link to the meeting. The link will not be active until a few minutes before the start of the meeting. See you there!

Saturday's, October 3 & November 7. Placerita Canyon Nature Center Docents' Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m. *Please call the Nature Center to confirm if walk will take place.* Directions: Take the 405 or 5 Freeway north to the 14 Freeway. Exit the 14 at Placerita Canyon. Turn right at the end of the off ramp and continue about 1.5 miles to the park entrance. Turn right and park at the Nature Center. Various leaders. For more information, call the Nature Center at (661) 259-7721.

Tuesday, November 3. Election Day! VOTE!

Monday, November 16. Zoom Board Meeting. 7:00 p.m. 🐦

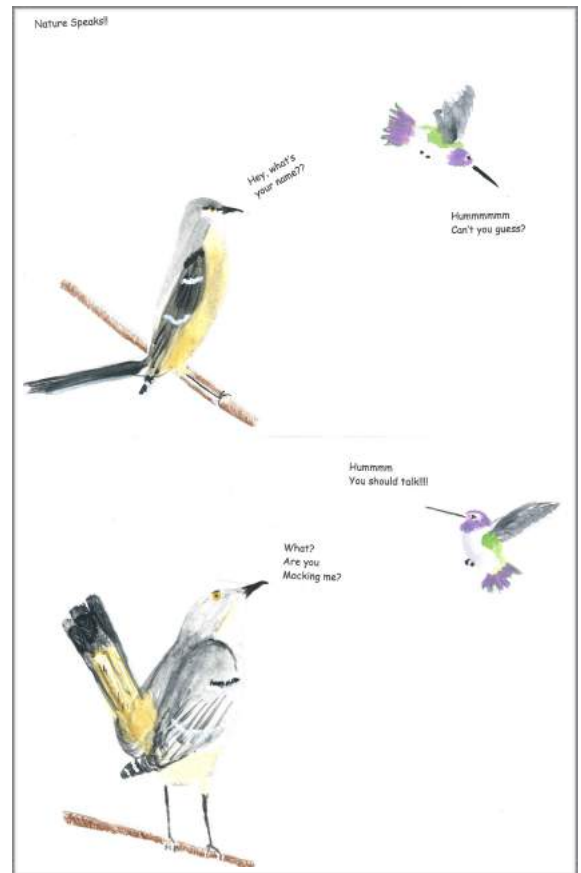
The Non-Birders' Guide to Birding by Paula Orlovich

Walking in Franklin Canyon several mornings a week has given me the sense of calm and peace I have been seeking during these difficult times. It has brought me back to focusing on the moment. The first time I walked the Old Road trail I had the most amazing encounter with a coyote. We surprised each other and I stopped to allow it to continue on its journey up the mountain before I continued. There was much to consider as I stood waiting. I heard a covey of quail sound the alarm and watched as they peered out at me from behind bushes. I spotted a cooper's hawk diving into a wooded area. As I walked I could identify many birds by their flight, calls, or behavior. On this walk I had forgotten my binoculars and so I could not confirm my sightings. I made a mental note to put my binoculars in the car for the next walk as I realized I wanted to see the birds yet it didn't matter if I identified the bird because knowing its name did not bring it more value to me. But that's just me—the casual birder. The one in the group who can spot the bird and once I identify it I always will follow it up with, "Well I am probably wrong so don't take my word as fact!"

So here is my advice for anyone just starting out with limited knowledge.

1. Forget the names, the details, the markings, the species and all the facts.
2. Sit in your backyard and walk in the neighborhood and try to understand which birds are frequently seen.
3. Listen to the birds' calls and watch their feeding behavior.
4. Notice if a new bird appears and when it arrived. (time of day, season)
5. Look for other wildlife such as squirrels, butterflies, and lizards.

Just be in that moment of looking, walking, listening, and thinking. Look up at the treetops because you may see a bird, or you may not, however just by looking up and moving forward you are reminding yourself to look ahead to have hope as we travel through these uncertain days. 🐦



Black Phoebe

The Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) is a small flycatcher that is ubiquitous in southern California. Bound to the western coast of the Americas, they span from Argentina to Oregon and they are



expanding northward. They are relatively small songbirds (within the Order Passeriformes), however they are distinguished from other songbirds by their less complex syrinx, or voice box. Due to these



differences, their vocalizations are much simpler, a repetitive, sharp chirp, compared to the intricate pitch and structure that many songbirds produce. It is a very recognizable bird with a charcoal grey or black head and back contrasted with a white belly. Their black wing feathers are edged with white, which may be a rust color in juveniles.

They tend to favor gardens and open areas with plenty of small, flying insects. They perch on a branch or a fence, dart out in acrobatic flight to

catch insects on the wing, then return to their lookout to repeat the process. This behavior is called sallying and is common among flycatchers. Along with behavior, a bird's morphology can also tell us a lot about their way of life. For instance, we can often infer a bird's diet by the structure of its beak. Many insectivorous birds have a narrow, tweezer-like beak that is perfect for plucking insects from a substrate (e.g., trees or the ground), whereas a seed eating bird often has a more triangular, robust beak for crushing seeds. Our Black Phoebe is an insect eating bird; however, its beak is wider and more flattened, acting as a snap trap adapted for catching insects in the air.



The Black Phoebe is a tyrant flycatcher, belonging to the family Tyrannidae. Originating in South America, this family became incredibly diverse due to lack of competition with other insectivorous families and the diverse habitats in the Neotropics. In fact, this family includes more species than any other avian family. As time passed, the union between North and South America allowed these flycatchers to invade North America. There were already many other insectivorous avian families in North America, so perhaps that is why the tyrannids did not become as diverse as they are in South America. Still, one species that was not only able to establish but has since persisted through human development is a small black and white flycatcher, our Black Phoebe. With stable and increasing numbers, as long as we keep planting native vegetation in our yards, Black Phoebes will likely continue to flourish. —Article and photos by Elliot Bloom

Conservation Corner by Dave Weeshoff, Conservation Chair

Plastic and Climate Change

In the August/September 2020 issue of our *Phainopepla* I wrote about “Plastic in the Ocean and Birds” and in prior missives I have written on Anthropogenic Climate Change and its effects on birds. As promised, in this edition I’ll discuss how plastic production, use, and disposal contribute to Climate Change and its impact on the birds we love.

The production of plastics is one of the largest and fastest-growing contributors to greenhouse gas emissions since they (petrochemicals) are derived from oil and natural gas. And as you consider all these issues remember, recycling is not a viable alternative.

The plastics boom is pumping huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The projected share of CO₂ emissions from global plastic production is the fastest-growing form of oil consumption globally and which will account for half of the extra demand for oil by 2050. Also, plastics and other petrochemicals form a large and rapidly growing destination for fracked natural gas. As plastic production grows, it will increase emissions that arise from the exploration, extraction, transport and refining of oil, natural gas, and coal. The production and use of plastics have nearly doubled in the last 20 years, are expected to double again over the next 20, and quadruple by the early 2050s. Carbon dioxide, methane and an array of other greenhouse gases are released at each stage of the plastics life cycle; from the extraction and refining of fossil fuels, to the energy-intensive processes that produce plastic resins, to the manufacturing which uses those resins (and natural gas) to make products, to their disposal (landfills), incineration, and potential environmental release of waste plastics into the oceans. In other words, the life-cycle of plastics alone could consume between 10 and 13 percent of the earth’s remaining carbon budget for staying below 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming. But these figures may still underestimate the total climate impact of plastic as the emissions from plastics do not end when they are thrown away. Waste plastic continues to release greenhouse gases as it very slowly degrades. Growing levels of microplastic debris in the oceans and atmosphere may interfere with basic biological processes, including where plankton captures carbon dioxide at the sea surface and sequesters carbon in the deep oceans.

As I’ve summarized before, from the perspective of our feathered friends, the two major impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, including all aspects of plastic creation, consumption, and disposal are:

- The structure, function, and resilience of all global ecosystems are changing rapidly, sometimes in unexpected ways, due to Anthropogenic Climate Change, and;
- The environmental changes due to greenhouse gas emissions are occurring faster than animals (e.g., birds) can adapt.

We must reduce our use of plastic, especially the single-use plastic which represents half of the plastic produced every single day.

As usual, please call me at (818) 618-1652 or email dave.Weeshoff@SFVAudubon.org with questions, comments, criticism, or to enlist in our conservation activities on behalf of our feathered friends. 🐦

Audubon-at-Home by Alan Pollack

E-mail Alan Pollack, our Audubon-at-Home Chair, with any questions you have with regard to creating a wildlife-friendly garden that can be used for publication. Alan offers FREE consultation/landscape design to help you make your yard wildlife friendly. He also gives a FREE, PowerPoint slide show/lecture to community groups, high school, and college classes on attracting wildlife to your garden and sustainable gardening practices. He can be contacted at (818) 340-2347 or at alan.pollack@sfvaudubon.org. 🐦

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For Chapter leaders' e-mail addresses, see our website:

www.SFVAudubon.org

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If you want to join or renew by check, please be sure to include your email address if you want to receive an acknowledgment. We can no longer thank you by regular mail. If you do not have an email address, please know how much we appreciate your involvement with, and support of, SFVAS.

The *PHAINOPEPLA*, published six times a year, is the newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409. San Fernando Valley Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, a non-profit conservation/education organization, and is dedicated to "the conservation of wildlife and natural resources."

Articles, letters, drawings, and photographs concerning conservation, ecology, birding, chapter activities, and articles of interest to the membership are welcome for publication in the *PHAINOPEPLA*.

Material from other newsletters or newspapers should include the source and date. Copy for the *PHAINOPEPLA* should be in the hands of the editor by the 3rd of the month to be included in the following month's newsletter.

Membership to National Audubon is separate and can be initiated on the website www.Audubon.org.

If you have any questions about membership, renewals, change of address or any other membership concerns, please contact Lynn Maddox at (818) 845-4688 or e-mail her at Lynn.Maddox@sfvaudubon.org.

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Phainopepla

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Please Note: Due to the recent fire in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve the socially distant, non-organized clean-up will NOT take place in October.



Don't worry, once the dust and ash settles we will have plenty of need and opportunities for volunteers to help clean debris, improve facilities, and plant native species of trees and grasses. See page 2 for more information on the aftermath of the fire. Photo by: Nurit Katz