



Phainopepla

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General Membership Programs

We hope you will join us for our informative programs.

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2024 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2024

Birders Needed! All are welcome
See pages 2—3 for locations and times

January

Hybrid Program: Behind the Scenes of Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education

Speaker: **Jaclyn DeSantis**

Location: **Tarzana Community and Cultural Center, 19130 Ventura Blvd., Tarzana**

Thursday, January 23, 2025, 7:00—8:30 p.m.

Join Jaclyn DeSantis, Education Program Manager at the Ojai Raptor Center (ORC), for an engaging presentation that takes you into the world of wildlife rehabilitation and education. Through a captivating slide show and videos, Jaclyn will share an inside look at the rehabilitation process for injured and orphaned raptors. She will discuss the most common reasons these birds are admitted, trends in species seen over the years, and the criteria used to release them back into the wild.



In addition, Jaclyn will introduce key aspects of the center's education program, using biofacts and mounts of native raptors. These specimens will highlight specific rehabilitation considerations for each species and provide insights into their care in both rehab and human care settings.

Jaclyn's former creative career took an unexpected turn in 2007, when a personal experience rescuing an injured opossum introduced her to the world of wildlife rehabilitation. She started apprenticing with Kimberly Stroud, the executive director of the Ojai Raptor Center. Jaclyn attended state and national wildlife conferences and courses, studying with raptor care specialists from around the world. In 2010 Jaclyn was hired as the organization's first staff member. She managed the wildlife hospital and education program. Amidst growth of the ORC, she transitioned to overseeing the education program. This program educates on biodiversity and conservation, fostering a deeper concern for wildlife.

Jaclyn is a certified environmental educator with the California Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education, and is a licensed wildlife rehabilitator with the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council. She also has memberships with various rehabilitation and education associations.

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2024 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Birders Needed

2024 has been an insane and rather tense year, but now that we have made it through the election, it is time to do something we are all in favor of: counting birds. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the National Audubon Society's annual bird census, is right around the corner, and as always, the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society will be joining other Audubon chapters and Bird Alliances across the western hemisphere to help gather critical data on bird populations for National Audubon's 125th CBC. The San Fernando Valley has been providing CBC data continuously since 1957, so this will be our 68th year participating. Over the years, we have tracked some interesting changes in bird populations within our count circle as The Valley has transitioned from an agricultural area into a more residential one.

On last year's count, we totaled 129 species and 14,733 individual birds, slightly lower than our average of 131 species and 15,985 individuals over the last 20 years; see the February-March 2024 *Phainopepla* for more details.

In order to properly understand the bird populations in the San Fernando Valley, we need to cover as many parks as possible. CBC participation is free and open to all, and extensive birding experience is not a prerequisite, only a willingness to come out and count, wind, rain, or shine. Ten locations that are putting together teams are listed below. If you are unable to join an existing CBC team, you may count on your own at your backyard bird feeders, local parks, and anywhere else in your neighborhood, as long as you are within our survey area, which is a 7.5 mile radius from Balboa and Nordhoff (an interactive map of the CBC circle is available [here](#)). Please report all bird species, the individual numbers of each species, and the time you spent birding to Alexander deBarros by email, alexanderdebarros@yahoo.com no later than January 3, 2025. You may also post your sightings on eBird, but please email the checklist to ensure it gets counted.

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve and Lake Balboa

Meeting Time: 7:30 am

Directions: Exit 405 fwy at Burbank Blvd and head west (turn left if you're on the northbound side, turn right if you're on the southbound side). Turn right onto Woodley Ave, and take the second right into the wildlife reserve. Meet in the first parking lot on the right. (34.179677,-118.479737)

Other stops: none

Terrain: flat

Approximate distance: 7.2 miles

Leader: Kris Ohlenkamp, kris.ohlenkamp@sbcglobal.net

Hansen Dam

Meeting Time: 7:30 am

Directions: Exit the 5 fwy at Osborne St and head east (turn right if you're on the northbound side, turn left if you're on the southbound side). Turn right onto Foothill Blvd, and make the first possible right into the parking lot. (34.272949,-118.383438)

Other stops: none

Terrain: mostly flat, some slopes

Approximate distance: 7.75 miles

Leader: Eric Shaphran, emshaph@umich.edu

O'Melveny Park and Bee Canyon Park

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit 118 fwy at Balboa Blvd and head north (turn left if you're on the eastbound side, turn right if you're on the westbound side). Turn left onto Session Blvd and take the second right into the park. (34.307617,-118.511292)

Other stops: None

Terrain: mostly flat, some light hills

Approximate distance: 3.77 miles

Leader: Paula Orlovich, (747) 237-3720

Reseda Park

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit the 101 fwy at Reseda Blvd and head north (turn right if you're on the northbound side, turn left if you're on the southbound side). Turn right onto Victory Blvd, then left into the big parking lot (after the pool). (34.186875,-118.532978)

Other stops: Encino Park and Los Encinos State Historic Park

Terrain: flat

Approximate distance: 3 miles total

Leader: Pat Bates, batesbird@gmail.com

L.A. River, Tujunga Wash, and L.A. Valley College bike ride

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit 101 N at Sepulveda Blvd and turn right. Take the second possible right onto Valleyheart Dr, and park on the street. Or, exit the 405 fwy at Ventura Blvd and turn left (turn once if you're on the northbound side, turn twice if you're on the southbound side). Turn right onto Valleyheart Dr, and park on the street. (34.161259,-118.465578)

Other stops: none

Terrain: flat, done by bike

Approximate distance: 17 miles

Leader: Jordan Ellison, jellison8640@gmail.com

Veteran's Memorial Park

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit the 210 fwy at Hubbard St and head east (turn right if you're on the westbound side, turn left if you're on the eastbound side). Turn left onto Eldridge Ave, then right onto Sayre St. Follow Sayre into Veteran's Memorial Park, where it ends. Turn left, and meet in the parking lot where that road ends. (34.326364,-118.419471)

Other stops: El Cariso Park

Terrain: mostly flat, some slopes

Approximate distance: 5 miles

Leader: Joey Di Liberto, jfdiliberto@gmail.com

Wilson Canyon

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit 210 fwy at Roxford St, and head north (turn right if you're on the westbound side, turn left if you're on the eastbound side). Stay on Roxford as it turns right and becomes Olive View Dr. After passing the hospital, turn right into Wilson Canyon Park, then turn left to reach the main parking lot. (34.329932,-118.444875)

Other stops: Stetson Ranch Park

Terrain: moderate hills

Approximate distance: 6 miles total

Leader: Chelsea Abrahamian and Ari Cuellar, chelsea.am@icloud.com

Small East Valley Parks

Meeting Time: 7:00 am

Directions: Exit 405 fwy at Nordhoff St and head west (turn right if you're on the southbound side, turn left if you're on the northbound side). Turn right onto Amestoy Ave, and immediately turn left onto Dearborn St. Park on the street. (34.237221,-118.508417)

Other stops: Valley Sod Farms, Sepulveda Rec Center, Panorama Park, Branford Park, Branford Settling Pond, Sheldon-Arleta Park, Fernangeles Rec Center, Sun Valley Park

Terrain: mostly flat

Approximate distance: 7 miles total

Leader: Oscar Rodriguez, rodthebirder@gmail.com

Limekiln, Moonshine, and Mormon Canyons

Meeting Time: 8:00 am

Directions: Exit the 118 fwy at Porter Ranch Dr and head north (turn right if you're on the westbound side, turn left if you're on the eastbound side). Follow Porter Ranch Dr to where it ends, turn right onto Sesnon Blvd, and immediately turn right again to park at Holleigh Bernson Memorial Park. (34.293032,-118.571073)

Other stops: none

Terrain: moderate to steep hills

Approximate distance: 7 miles

Leader: Richard Armerding, rarmerding@gmail.com

Aliso Canyon and Wilbur-Tampa Park

Meeting Time: 7:30 am

Directions: Exit the 118 fwy at Tampa Ave and head north (turn right if you're on the westbound side, turn left if you're on the eastbound side). Turn right onto Wilbur Ave, and park on the street. (34.288315,-118.556146)

Other stops: none

Terrain: light to moderate hills

Approximate distance: 7 miles

Leader: Charlie Wilken, cswilken@gmail.com

Devil's Canyon

Meeting Time: 7:30

Directions: Exit the 118 fwy at De Soto Ave and head south (turn right if you're on the eastbound side, turn left if you're on the westbound side). Turn right on Chatsworth St, then right again on Canoga Ave. Park on the street, just after you cross under the freeway. (34.275852,-118.595369)

Other stops: none

Terrain: light to moderate hills

Approximate distance: 5.5 miles

Leader: Alexander deBarros, alexanderdebarros@yahoo.com

Chatsworth Hillside Parks

Meeting Time: 7:00 am

Directions: Exit 118 fwy at Topanga Canyon Blvd and head south (turn right if you're on the eastbound side, turn left if you're on the westbound side). Turn right onto Devonshire St, and follow Devonshire to where it ends in Chatsworth Park South. (34.260446,-118.617713)

Other stops: Stoney Point Park, Chatsworth Park North, Chatsworth Oaks Park, Oakwood Cemetery, Chase Park

Terrain: moderate to steep hills at Stoney Point and Chatsworth Oaks, light hills at Chatsworth Park South and Chase Park, flat at Oakwood Cemetery and Chatsworth Park North

Approximate distance: 5 miles total

Leader: Robin Share, robindshare@gmail.com

Old Mission Trail

Meeting Time: 7:30 am

Directions: Exit 118 fwy at Tampa Ave and head south (turn right if you're on the eastbound side, turn left if you're on the westbound side). Turn right onto Tunney Ave, and park on the side of the road. (34.258823,-118.557665)

Other stops: Porter Valley Country Club

Terrain: light hills

Approximate distance: 6 miles

Leader: Alex Dopp, alex.dopp@gmail.com



Meet Our New Board Members -submitted by Joanne Millius

We would like to introduce two new Board Members to the San Fernando Valley Audubon Chapter. Both Bill and Rod have been active in bird walks and events over many years. They would now like to help lead the chapter by attending Board Meetings and becoming more active in decisions affecting San Fernando Valley Audubon.



Bill Lepler's "spark bird" was a Baltimore Oriole seen on Long Island when he was twelve years old and has been birding ever since. He has participated in San Fernando Valley Audubon Chapter's bird walks at the Sepulveda Basin for over ten years.

Bill recently retired from a career in Marketing, most recently at City of Hope. He is looking to apply his interests in birding education and ecology as a Board Member, as well as to bring some Marketing skills to his role.



"Rod" Oscar Rodriguez's "spark bird" was a Turkey Vulture that flew over his shoulder and they had a moment. The next week he went on his first bird walk at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve. He regularly does the Hansen Dam walk with Pat Bates. He has also done O'Melveny Park and Malibu State Park walks. His favorite bird is the Red-Tailed Hawk.

Rod grew up in the San Fernando Valley and graduated from Birmingham High School. He lived in Alaska for half of his life and is an Army Veteran.



Update to last Phainopepla's "New Master Plans are on the Way!" - per Senior Biologist of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the public comment periods for the new Hansen Dam And Sepulveda Dam Master Plan revisions have been moved to January 13, 2025—February 12, 2025. Check www.sfvaudubon.org for updated information as this important deadline approaches.

Calendar of Events

To reach an event leader you may call our message forwarding service at (747) 237-3720

DECEMBER 2024

Sunday, December 1. Sepulveda Basin. 8:00—11:00 a.m. Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Park in the lot and walk past the low, rock-faced buildings to our meeting place on the other side of the buildings. Leader: Alexander deBarros, Alexander.deBarros@sfvaudubon.org.

Thursday, December 12. Bird Sit with Nature Journaling, O'Melveny Park. 10:00—11:45 a.m. If you would like to mindfully connect with birds and all of nature, join us at O'Melveny Park—at the picnic tables near the bathrooms. (Rain cancels and moves it to the 3rd Thursday.) What to bring: a cushion or a comfortable chair, a beverage/snack, binoculars, a journal, and something to write/draw with. This event is limited to 10 people. To reserve a spot, contact Teri Carnesciali at teri.carnesciali@sfvaudubon.org. Co-leader: Mary Lou Sharp.



Saturday, December 14. Beginner Bird and Nature Walk. Sepulveda Basin. 9:00—10:30 a.m. This tour is perfect for families with school-age children, beginning or first-time birders, and people who want to learn more about the Wildlife Reserve. Directions: Driving on Woodley Ave. north from Burbank Blvd. or south from Victory Blvd., go .5 miles and turn east at the sign for the Japanese Garden. Continue straight (don't turn into the garden) and drive past the Cricket Fields and around the tree in the middle of the road, continuing to the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet at the amphitheater. This tour will meet on 2nd Saturday's of the month October—March. Leader: Muriel Kotin. muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org. Heavy rain cancels.

Saturday, December 14. Christmas Bird Count. Come out and count birds for the 125th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. All are welcome. No experience necessary—just a willingness to count rain or shine. See pages 2—3 for meeting times and locations.

Sunday, December 15. Malibu Creek State Park. 8:00 a.m. Meet at the second (lower) day-use parking lot. Entrance to the park is on the west side of Las Virgenes Road, just south of Mulholland Hwy. Entrance fee is \$12 per car. Leaders: Katheryn Barton and David Barton. kathy.barton@sfvaudubon.org.



Tuesday, December 17. Weekday Wander at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 9:00—11:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. RAIN CANCELS. Leader: Paula Orlovich, (747) 237-3720.

**NO General Membership Meeting in December
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

Saturday, December 28. Hansen Dam Birding 8:00—11:00 a.m. 10965 Dronfield Ave., Pacoima, CA. Dronfield Ave. intersects Osborne St. approximately ½ mile south of Foothill Blvd. Turn into the park on Dronfield, and meet near the ranger station. Accessibility is good for this site which is mostly on a packed dirt road. Leader: Pat Bates, pat.bates@sfvaudubon.org.

**Reminder as we head into the winter season, that RAIN
CANCELS birding events.**

JANUARY 2025

Sunday, January 5. Sepulveda Basin. 8:00—11:00 a.m. Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Park in the lot and walk past the low, rock-faced buildings to our meeting place on the other side of the buildings. Leader: Alexander deBarros, Alexander.deBarros@sfvaudubon.org.

Thursday, January 9. Bird Sit with Nature Journaling, O'Melveny Park. 10:00—11:45 a.m. If you would like to mindfully connect with birds and all of nature, join us at O'Melveny Park—at the picnic tables near the bathrooms. (Rain cancels and moves it to the 3rd Thursday.) What to bring: a cushion or a comfortable chair, a beverage/snack, binoculars, a journal, and something to write/draw with. This event is limited to 10 people. To reserve a spot, contact Teri Carnesciali at teri.carnesciali@sfvaudubon.org. Co-leader: Mary Lou Sharp.

Saturday, January 11. Beginner Bird and Nature Walk. Sepulveda Basin. 9:00—10:30 a.m. This tour is perfect for families with school-age children, beginning or first-time birders, and people who want to learn more about the Wildlife Reserve. Directions: Driving on Woodley Ave. north from Burbank Blvd. or south from Victory Blvd., go .5 miles and turn east at the sign for the Japanese Garden. Continue straight (don't turn into the garden) and drive past the Cricket Fields and around the tree in the middle of the road, continuing to the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet at the amphitheater. This tour will meet on 2nd Saturday's of the month, October—March. Leader: Muriel Kotin. muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org. Heavy rain cancels.

Sunday, January 19. Malibu Creek State Park. 8:00 a.m. Meet at the second (lower) day-use parking lot. Entrance to the park is on the west side of Las Virgenes Road, just south of Mulholland Hwy. Entrance fee is \$12 per car. Leaders: Katheryn Barton and David Barton. kathy.barton@sfvaudubon.org.

Tuesday, January 21. Weekday Wander at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 9:00—11:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. RAIN CANCELS. Leader: Paula Orlovich, (747) 237-3720.

Thursday, January 23. General Membership Meeting. 7:00—8:30 p.m. In-person hybrid program: **Behind the Scenes of Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education.** Speaker: Jaclyn DeSantis. Location: Tarzana Community and Cultural Center, 19130 Ventura Blvd., Tarzana. Come early for social time. To join via Zoom [click here](#), to sign up and receive a link prior to event.



Saturday, January 25. Hansen Dam Birding. 8:15—11:00 a.m. 10965 Dronfield Ave., Pacoima, CA. Dronfield Ave. intersects Osborne St. approximately ½ mile south of Foothill Blvd. Turn into the park on Dronfield, and meet near the ranger station. Accessibility is good for this site which is mostly on a packed dirt road. Leader: Pat Bates, pat.bates@sfvaudubon.org.

Sunday, January 26. Eagle Eyes Young Birders Club - 1st Meeting. Announcing the NEW San Fernando Valley Audubon Eagle Eyes Young Birders Club. O'Melveny Park in Granada Hills. 9 – 11am.

Join us and become part of a fun, supportive community where your passion for nature and birds can soar. Our first birding event will be a walk

at O'Melveny Park. Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. We will have binoculars to loan and journals available for children who sign up. Check out our website for more information and secure your spot.

Election 2024 - Some Good News for our Environment and Los Angeles City Park Rangers

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society supported an Audubon California endorsement of California State Proposition 4, a bill which would “enact the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which, if approved by the voters, would authorize the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$10,000,000,000 pursuant to the State General Obligation Bond Law to finance projects for safe drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience, wildfire and forest resilience, coastal resilience, extreme heat mitigation, biodiversity and nature-based climate solutions, climate-smart, sustainable, and resilient farms, ranches, and working lands, park creation and outdoor access, and clean air programs.”

We are very pleased to see that this bill has apparently been passed in the recent election. Funding will be available for various important environmental projects in our area, and this is a project that our Audubon California leadership has worked on diligently for several years.

Los Angeles City Measure FF, which will cover all City of Los Angeles sworn peace officers with the same pension plan enjoyed by the Los Angeles Police Department, appears on its way to passage. While on the one hand the city has budget issues, perhaps a more urgent concern is the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified Park Rangers. One significant factor has been the disparity in pension coverage for these highly qualified rangers. There are

other issues, most significantly, the massive underfunding of the Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks, but this is one small step in getting the rangers we need. —by Pat Bates 🐦

SFVAS Partners with Santa Monica College - Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains Fund to promote Birds, Bugs and CA Native Plants!

SFVAS partners with Santa Monica College-Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains Fund (SAMOFund) to bring not only classes on gardening for birds and bugs to the campus, but also free native narrow leaf milkweed! The narrow-leaved milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) is perhaps the most important host plant for Monarch Butterflies and also provides nectar and habitat for other insects and birds. On October 25 SFVAS Conservation Co-Chair Pat Bates was at Santa Monica College-Malibu with a presentation on native-plant restoration and gardening to support native species of bugs and birds. The lecture was well attended, and was followed by offering all attendees up to six milkweed seedlings and a brief field trip to nearby Legacy Park. In all, 216 milkweed plants were distributed at the college and beyond. SFVAS thanks the SAMOFund plant nursery for the plants, and is happy to support the SAMOFund's advocacy for restoring and preserving our native flora. Currently SFVAS is funding training of native-plant horticulture community interns and will be presenting workshops to the public next year. Also next year, SFVAS is slated to make at least two more presentations at Santa Monica College-Malibu.—by Pat Bates

The 2024 Western Field Ornithologists Conference —by Alexander deBarros

From October 10–13, I attended the 48th Annual Western Field Ornithologists (WFO) conference in San Diego. These conferences serve as a place for amateur birders and professional ornithologists to meet and hear about the latest research being done. But everybody spends most of their time birding.



Alexander deBarros and Jon Dunn

I spent my Thursday in the Laguna Mountains, exploring both the Cleveland National Forest and Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. We started at the Cleveland National Forest's Agua Dulce Trail, walking through a mixed Ponderosa Pine and Black Oak forest, with many open, grassy meadows. It felt like an area that hadn't changed since the Pleistocene, a place where Mastodons and Giant Ground Sloths wouldn't seem unusual. While we didn't see any of those, we were surrounded by more Acorn Woodpeckers, Steller's Jays, Mountain Chickadees, and Dark-eyed Juncos than anybody could count, not to mention the flock of Pygmy Nuthatches that seemed to be following us around. Our small group was also lucky enough to contain the legendary Jon Dunn, author of the *National Geographic Field Guides to Birds of North America* (including the one I had in my pocket during the trip). In addition to spotting many birds (including the first Hammond's Flycatcher I'd seen in months, and several lifers for other group members), Jon shared several incredible stories of ornithology that the rest of us had not been in the field long enough to know about. After exploring the forest, we went to Cuyamaca Lake, where we saw many blackbirds, Turkey Vultures, and the lake's resident Bald Eagles. We ended the spectacular trip at the Cuyamaca Rancho's Green Valley Campground, where we found Lawrence's Goldfinches and a Western (Pacific-slope) Flycatcher, rounding us out to 50 species for the day.



Laguna Mountains group



Bald Eagle and Turkey Vultures

That evening, we went to the reception at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Three hundred birders going in as everybody else was leaving meant the parking lot was a bit chaotic, but it was quite nice once we were inside. Museum staff brought out some of the specimen collection, including several first state records, others that date back to when the museum opened, and a few Least and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels found dead after Hurricane Hilary



Reception at the San Diego Natural History Museum

last year. Quite a wide array. We were also free to explore the museum, which was incredible, and definitely worth a trip back.

Friday was another early start. This day's trip was to Robb Field, the San Diego River estuary, and Formosa Slough. While most of the other trips were quite a ways from the hotel, this one was literally across the river. The fog was so dense when we arrived that we had to practically bird entirely by ear for the first 20 minutes. But out of that fog came a flock of Swinhoe's White-Eyes (introduced in Orange County in 2006, spread to San Diego in 2018), many Cassin's Kingbirds, and my lifer Tropical Kingbird. As the fog lifted, we found Vermilion Flycatchers, dozens of warblers from four different species, and an oriole that was later identified as a Baltimore Oriole. On the way out, we even found a flock of Horned Larks. Not bad for a 50 acre baseball field. We continued birding at the river, which was covered in birds. Many Gulls, Terns, Cormorants, and Pelicans, 11 species of Sandpipers, and five species of Herons (including Reddish Egret and Little Blue Heron). And out of the reeds came the highlight of the trip, an endangered bird that could only be found in a handful of places in San Diego:



Juvenile Horned Lark



Mallards, Common Gallinules, and a Green Heron

a Ridgway's Rail. Split from Clapper Rail in 2014, this species rarely comes out in the open, and is heard far more often than it is seen. The one we saw actually took us a while to identify as a Ridgway's, as this species looks very similar to the smaller Virginia Rail, which is found in the same area and far more common. The few plumage differences were difficult to pick out, especially as the fog was starting to roll back in, but we eventually got a lucky break when one member of the group saw a Marbled Godwit walk by the Rail, and noted their similar sizes. With a large bird to compare it to, we knew we were looking at a Ridgway's. As



Great Blue Heron

the fog thickened again, we moved 3/4 mile further inland, to the Famosa Slough, where it was completely sunny. This tiny wetland, no larger than Lake Balboa, held 28 species, including 11 that we had missed at Robb Field and the River. This brought us to a total of 71 species for the day. The highlight at Famosa Slough was a Green-tailed Towhee, which was first spotted there the day before. This montane species is unusual in coastal wetlands, and was probably migrating through on its way to Mexico. (Continued next page)



The conference hall

After four spectacular hours of birding, we returned to the hotel for the science sessions, where half a dozen researchers presented on some recent work they'd been doing. We had talks on a variety of subjects, from monitoring endangered bird populations, to changes in habitat management, to how to identify the newly recognized



Cinnamon Teal

Cocos Booby (look for a lighter head, darker eye, contrasting bill, and a dark bar on the underwing), as well as updates from the California and Hawaii Birds Records Committees. The Birds Records Committees make note of vagrant birds and assess whether the bird made its own way to the area or if it was brought there by people. Did a White-tailed Eagle cross the Bering Strait and eventually migrate past the Golden Gate Bridge, or is a zoo in the Bay Area missing a bird? According to the CBRC, the Eagle made it there on its own. Once the science sessions were done, Nathan Pieplow, an expert on identifying birds by call, hosted the sound ID challenge. And challenge is the right word! He takes several series of recorded bird calls from across western North America and teams try to ID them, but since many birds can make similar calls and most birders are only familiar with their local species, it gets very hard very fast. I didn't participate, as I have a history of humiliating myself in the challenge, a trend that continued in this one (look up Rock Ptarmigan and tell me you wouldn't have IDed it as a frog). When that was finished, I joined everyone else under 30 at the youth reception, and had a nice time sharing my birding experiences with the next generation of experts. The hotel was right by a harbor, so after the reception, we decided to explore the dock for marine life. We turned up several kinds of fish, a Round Stingray, and a rather annoyed Striped Shore Crab. We ended the night by finding three Lesser Two-spot Octopuses, certainly the coolest species hiding there.

Saturday was another big day, in fact the Cornell Global Big Day, so everybody was determined to find a lot of



Santee Lakes group

birds. This day's field trip was to the Santee Lakes, a series of seven man-made lakes by a water treatment plant, with grassy parkland surrounding the lakes. Each lake was covered with hundreds of Ducks, Geese, and Coots, as well as other waterbirds, with even more species in the surrounding trees and parkland. I saw more Least Bitterns and Common Gallinules on that one trip than I had in my whole life. Early on, we were surprised to find a Black-and-white Warbler, not only because it's normally an east coast species, but also because it had not been found on the previous day's trip. As we continued, we found such cool species as the Costa's Hummingbird, Wood Duck, Scaly-breasted Munia, and ten different species of ducks. At one point, we had Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Western Flycatcher,

Anna's Hummingbird, and a flock of Bushtits in the same tree. It was a lot of fun trying to pick out each bird. When we sat down at the end to go over the list, there was a flock of Canada Geese feeding nearby, then a Cackling Goose swam over to join them. Despite some of the Canadas trying to chase it off, the Cackling brought us up to 73 species, the highest species total I had on the whole trip. A Big Day indeed.



Least Bittern in flight

While the point of a big day is to spend the whole day birding, there were more science sessions scheduled for

that afternoon. This day's researchers presented on an even greater variety of subjects, from environmental impacts on California Gnatcatchers, Cactus Wrens, and desert Thrasher species, to toxic chemical contamination in wetlands fed by a wastewater treatment plant, to figuring out whether or not Rock Pigeons can taste sucrose (they can't, by the way, but now this can be compared to Fruit Doves when they get tested). While all the presentations were fascinating, one that was particularly cool was a whole genome sequencing of the Wrentit that revealed *Chamaea fasciata henshawi*, the subspecies found in Southern California and the Sierras, was actually two genetically distinct populations that diverged during the Ice Age, meaning the Southern California population will have to be split off as its own subspecies. Wrentit subspecies are hard to tell apart anyway, so figuring out if there are physical differences between the Sierra and Southern Wrentits presents a new challenge for ornithologists. Looking forward to how that shakes out. After the science sessions was the photo ID panel, where WFO ornithologist Ed Harper shows photos of hard to ID birds and a group of WFO's best experts talk through their process of identifying everything. It's



Gorgeous Canada Goose



Male Great-tailed Grackle

always interesting to hear what characteristics the experts are looking as I follow along with my field guide. While we usually looked at the same field marks, there were many times they pointed out something that went over my head or correctly identified a species that hadn't even occurred to me as a possibility. It's a humbling reminder of how much I still have to learn. (Continued next page)



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

After the photo ID panel, was the keynote banquet, a fancy dinner where awards are handed out and one speaker hosts what is basically an extended science session. Unusually, it was outdoors, so it was a lot colder than what everybody had prepared for. Fortunately, we had all brought heavy jackets for birding. The food and conversation were wonderful, and both the legendary Jon Dunn and Phil Unitt (the curator of birds at the San Diego Natural History Museum, editor of WFO's scientific journal, and namesake of the Catalina Island subspecies of Hutton's Vireo) received lifetime achievement awards, which were presented by the great Kimball Garrett and incoming WFO President Debbie Van Dooremolen. After the awards and some remarks by scholarship winners and my friends Santi Tabares and Teodelina Martelli, it was time for the keynote speech, where Kevin Burns talked about Tanagers.



Kimball Garrett presents for the California Bird Records Committee

Ten years ago, North American Tanagers (genus *Piranga*) were moved from the Tanager family into the Cardinal & Grosbeak family. This was just one part of a much larger taxonomic reshuffling of the Tanager family and their close relatives. Traditionally, Warblers, Blackbirds, Sparrows, Finches, and Grosbeaks, were grouped based on their physical characteristics, with Tanagers as a leftover group for the colorful birds that didn't really fit anywhere else. Because Tanagers didn't have a unifying characteristic aside from being colorful, it was sometimes hard to justify keeping all 242 species in the same family. When DNA analysis finally came along, it was found that only 3/4 of Tanagers were actually Tanagers, with the other 1/4 being split among Finches, Sparrows, Cardinals, and unique families endemic to the Caribbean. However, that same study showed that over 180 species of Warblers, Sparrows, and Finches (including Darwin's Finches), were actually Tanagers! With 384 species, half of which were once assigned to other families, Tanagers get very confusing very fast. While genetically distinct, they come in every color, with every beak shape, and in every habitat. This level of variation is normally just seen on islands, when a new species evolves to fill every open niche. This may not be a coincidence, as South America was an island continent (like Australia is today) from 35 million years ago to three million years ago, and there was a major extinction event roughly 34 million years ago that could've left many open niches in South America. This correlation is still being investigated and will probably be difficult to prove, as animals that weigh less than an ounce rarely fossilize, but it's interesting to think about. Burns ended his presentation by talking briefly about the Inti Tanager, a species first officially recorded in 2000 and scientifically described in 2021. It's only known to breed in a single national park in Bolivia and migrates to a different national park in Peru for its non-breeding season. Intra-tropical migration like this



California Sea Lions

entirely protected). It is literally a glowing example of how much more we still have to discover.

Sunday was the last day. It was also the earliest, coldest, and longest day of the whole conference for me, as this was the pelagic trip. Ten hours on a boat, going up to 30 miles off shore for birds that can't be seen any other way. The sun was barely up as we left the harbor, at least that's what I think; it was hidden by



A curious Spotted Sandpiper

dense clouds for the first half of the trip. But we could still see clearly enough to pick out Sea Lions, Garibaldi Fish, Surfbirds, and an Osprey before we had even cleared the breakwater. As we started getting out to sea, the birds started getting way cooler. A Pacific Loon flew right over the boat, a Cocos Booby momentarily appeared out of the haze, and we made a decision to approach a distant speck that turned out to be a young Sabine's Gull. Because most seabirds are very difficult to identify and often form large flocks, one seabird expert stayed on the bridge where he could spot birds in any direction. Four other expert birders were strategically placed throughout



Common Dolphins

the boat, where they could not only spot birds, but radio in reports of birds the rest of the group spotted but couldn't identify to species, and one person on the bridge kept all the eBird lists. This system was very efficient, especially when we started encountering big flocks of seabirds. Over the course of the day, we saw hundreds upon hundreds of Shearwaters, mostly Black-vented within 15 miles of shore, and mostly Pink-footed beyond 15 miles, with a handful of Sooty mixed in throughout. These seabirds, along with Western Gulls, Brown Pelicans, and occasionally Elegant Terns, feed on



A Yellow-rumped Warbler lost 15 miles out to sea

small fish, but since the birds can only dive so deep, they rely on Dolphins to drive the fish up to the surface. We saw hundreds of Common Dolphins, most in large pods fishing with the birds, but also many smaller groups surfing on the waves generated by the boat. Patrolling the ending frenzies were Jaegers, both Pomarine and Parasitic. These pirates chase after other birds to force them to drop fish, which they then steal. In between the large flocks, we also found several smaller birds, Craver's and Guadeloupe Murrelets. These two closely related (Continued next page)



Pomarine Jaeger

species are no bigger than California Towhees, but spend their entire lives out at sea diving for fish larvae, only returning to land to lay eggs and raise chicks. By the time we got 30 miles out, the clouds dissipated, and there was no land to be seen in any direction. It was both eerie and calming, a rather strange combination. We were both halfway to San Clemente Island and halfway through the day, so we turned back, moving a few miles further south than we had been before. It was mostly the same species, with a few exciting exceptions. We briefly saw an Elephant Seal popping its head up for air, and several Ocean Sunfish. With most of the Sunfish, we just saw the tips of their fins, but one had its whole body turned towards the boat as we passed by. It was shocking to see just how huge it was (adult Sunfish are 6 ft long and 8 ft tall). But it was not the most



South Polar Skua

shocking animal we found. One contender for that title was the South Polar Skua. This bulkier relative of the Jaegers breeds on the Antarctic coast and nearby islands, then spends the rest of the year voyaging across the oceans, some reaching as far as Newfoundland and Southern Alaska. Skuas and Jaegers don't usually approach boats, but this one got really close, allowing for some spectacular pictures as it harasses the Western Gulls that were following the boat. The other contender for most exciting bird was literally the last new species of the trip, the Manx Shearwater. This Atlantic species is almost identical to the Black-vented Shearwater, except



Guadeloupe Murrelet

Manx is whiter below and has white undertail coverts instead of black. It was spotted in the same area on Thursday's pelagic trip, but only four people on that boat saw it, and it wasn't identified until they were looking over their photos. As we approached the shore, we saw a flock of over 200 Black-vented Shearwaters, and stopped to check for a Manx. We didn't find one, and moved on, soon finding another flock of 100 Black-vents. We checked this one too, only half-expecting to find the Manx, but we found it! It got fairly close to the boat, and we all made sure that everybody saw it. We then returned to the dock having seen 35 species (six of which were lifers for me) and 2,422 individual birds!



A rare Manx Shearwater (lower right, with the white undertail coverts) with several Black-vented Shearwaters

And that was the Western Field Ornithologists conference. Four wonderful days surrounded by experts from across the western United States. I saw beautiful habitats, learned from incredible people, and saw 153 species of birds, eight of which were lifers (I'm at 416 now). It was an incredible experience, and I'm very grateful to SFVAS for sponsoring me. The next WFO conference will be June 4-8, 2025, in Yakima, Washington. I'd strongly recommend looking in to it, and you should probably expect another absurdly long article about it in the August/September 2025 *Phainopepla*. 🐦



SFVAS Invests in Regional Habitat Preservation and Restoration

SFVAS is pleased to partner with the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** and others to fund development of a west coast module of a bird species and habitat mapping utility. The Cornell lab describes the project rationale as follows: "At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Cornell Lab), we believe land trusts can help birds, and birds can benefit land trusts. To develop mutually beneficial collaborations between land trusts and the bird conservation community and to accelerate bird conservation on private lands, the Cornell Lab's Conservation Science program launched the Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative (LTBCI) in 2013."

The interactive decision support Mapping Tool will enable users to interact with eBird Status and Trend (eBird S&T) modeled abundance data combined with strategic land data layers to identify climate resilient lands critical for birds of conservation concern and to look at the highest value habitats to increase local and regional conservation impact, inform land planning, generate fundraising dollars and grant support, and bring birds into the picture when addressing ecological priorities. We at SFVAS are very excited to play a role in expanding this resource to our west coast and look forward to receiving training in its use. We anticipate the tool to be useful for evaluating various types of land use decisions, including acquisitions and evaluation of potential development and hope to see it online in early 2025.



On a local level, SFVAS is pleased to be a sponsor of the **2025 Theodore Payne Foundation's 22nd Annual Native Plant Garden Tour**. SFVAS is committed to expansion of regional native plant habitat throughout our urban area, and recognizes the importance of this in supporting our birds and insects. Tickets to the garden tour will be available in early 2025, we will post a link on our website when they are available. 🐦



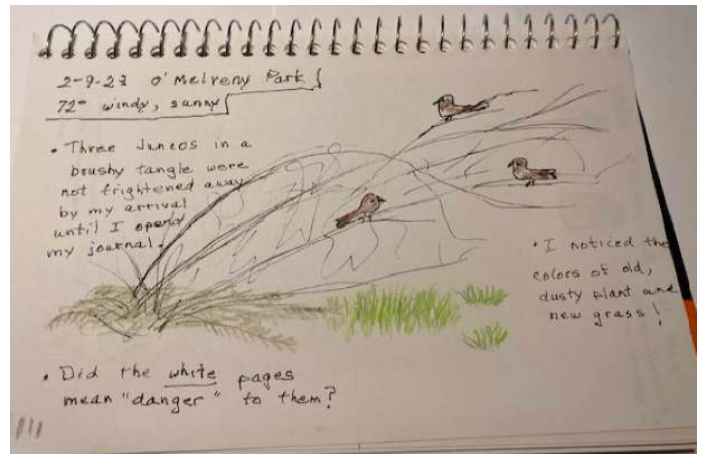
Bird Sit Bulletin by Teri Carnesciali

About three years ago one of our members, Diana Keeney, requested that I join her in establishing an activity that would be new for our chapter—combining a bird sit with nature journaling. Soon afterwards we began meeting one morning a month at O’Melveny Park. Participants have been enjoying these special times since. Sadly, Diana passed away in 2023, but we remember her fondly and are so grateful she initiated this activity. Her family agreed to our sharing a few pages from her nature journal with *Phainopepla* readers.



At the bird sit each of us spends some time alone quietly observing the birds that come our way. Afterwards we gather together to share our observations. Each participant is free to record what they see in whatever way appeals to them on any given day. As you can see in the photo, at one bird sit Diana chose to write a haiku directed to a White-crowned Sparrow! Spending time in nature sparks our curiosity and sometimes we jot down things we wonder about on the journal page. It’s a treat to be with the birds and to learn from each other.

You can find more information on the Events Calendar. Newcomers are always welcome.



The 25th Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway!

January 23 – 26, 2025
Patrick Ranch Museum
Chico - Durham CA

Join us in the search for winter birds of the Pacific Flyway on 4-days of action-packed field trips with experienced trip leaders, plus more.



FIELD TRIPS, WORKSHOPS, EXHIBITS & ACTIVITIES
Patrick Ranch Museum



BANQUET & KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Bell Memorial Union
Chico State
Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz
Birds by BIJS



"Birds, Birds & More Birds" ART EXHIBIT & RECEPTION
Museum of Northern California Art (mosca)

Registration begins in early December

If you have any questions, you can reach us at info@snowgoosefestival.org or by calling the Festival Office at 530-592-9092

Announcing the NEW San Fernando Valley Audubon Eagle Eyes Young Birders Club

Join us and become part of a fun, supportive community where your passion for nature and birds can soar. Our first birding event will be a walk on Sunday, January 26, 2025 at O’Melveny Park in Granada Hills, 9 - 11am. We will have binoculars to loan and journals available for children who sign up. Check out our website www.sfvaudubon.org for more information and to secure your spot.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEW Chapter Phone Number

To reach a board member or event leader you may now call our forwarding message service at **(747) 237-3720**

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How did you learn about SFVAS?

If you want to join or renew by check, please be sure to include your e-mail address if you want to receive an acknowledgment. We can no longer thank you by regular mail. If you do not have an e-mail 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 non-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society, and is dedicated to "Nature Education and the Conservation of Wildlife."

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) 425-0962 or e-mail her at Lynn.Maddox@sfvaudubon.org.

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For Chapter leaders' e-mail addresses, see our Website: www.SFVAudubon.org



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Phainopepla

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Nominating Committee - Rod Rodriguez, Richard Davis, & Alexander deBarros, chair

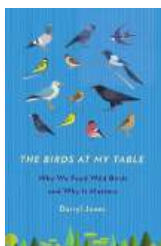
The Nominating Committee is looking for volunteers who are interested in participating on our board of directors or committees for the upcoming SFVAS year, July 1, 2025—June 30, 2026. Most board members start their service as chairs of a committee or as elected board members-at-large.

Newcomers to the board are important! We are volunteers, so you don't have to have prior experience. It is a wonderful opportunity to expand your knowledge and expertise while helping SFVAS work to fulfill our mission: to preserve and enhance the natural habitat within our territory, to increase the public's awareness and appreciation of bird life and the natural environment, and to create a social environment that encourages individual development and participation. Please contact Alexander deBarros if you are interested in serving in any capacity at alexanderdebarros@yahoo.com.

Book Report -by Marianne Davis

THE BIRDS AT MY TABLE: Why We Feed Wild Birds and Why It Matters

By Darryl Jones



I saw this book at the Mono Lake Committee store and had to have it. I LOVE feeding our local birds and regard the job as necessary as feeding the dogs and my human family every morning. Jones is based in Australia, and much of his research is based there, but the data he cites from the UK and Europe is impressive: this hobby is a multi-million dollar industry, and takes place in almost two thirds of the population canvassed. Does it make a difference to the birds? There is plenty of evidence on both sides. Feeding birds started in northern European countries, where it could make the difference for survival in cold snowy weather. In the warmer climes, it's not as clear. But recent findings suggest that there is a positive effect on bird survival. And then, there is the sheer enjoyment of interacting with wildlife; doing something to help others is also a beneficial act for us. Jones goes through all the reasons and concludes that we ARE helping, ourselves as well as birds. A very enjoyable read.