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General Membership Programs

We hope you will join us for our informative programs.
[CLICK HERE](#), to signup and receive a link prior to all events.

IMPORTANT change to 2nd Saturday Beginner Birding at the Sepulveda Basin—NOW scheduled on 2nd Sunday's. August will be from 8:00-10:00 a.m. and September-May will be 9:00-11:00 a.m.

—REMINDER—
NO GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING IN AUGUST

**Become a member
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To reach an event leader or board member call our Chapter Phone Number
(747) 237-3720

Number is a Message Forwarding Service

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM September

Title: Finding Refuge After Fire: Giant Sequoias and Riparian Forests as Critical Fire Refugia for Migratory Birds

Speaker: Edwin Jacobo, Assistant Manager for the Kern River Preserve

Thursday, September 24, 2026, 6:45 p.m. Zoom site opens, 7:00 p.m. meeting begins



San Fernando Valley Audubon's first meeting of the year will host speaker Edwin Jacobo. His presentation will focus on how Giant sequoia groves and riparian forests may serve as critical fire refugia during migration for migratory birds as wildfires become larger, more frequent, and more severe across western North America. He used automated telemetry, field observations, and body condition data to investigate how migratory birds respond to wildfire at stopover sites and the potential role of giant sequoia groves and riparian vegetation as fire refugia.

The San Fernando Valley Audubon Society chapter helped fund a state-of-the-art Motus study on Western Tanagers within the Kern River Preserve. Results from these studies underscore the importance of the KRP for migratory birds and the need to continue studying the migration ecology of birds.

Edwin Jacobo, PhD, from Washington State University. He has a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's in environmental sciences from Universidad Autonoma de Nayarit, Mexico. He is interested in migratory bird responses to environmental change, particularly climate-related disturbances. His research focuses on avian responses to alterations in habitat quality caused by wildlife, drought, and tree mortality. Edwin seeks to understand the mechanisms underlying bird responses to environmental change to inform habitat management and conservation needs.

When not doing fieldwork, Edwin likes fishing and birding with his wife and spending time with his family in Mexico.

[CLICK HERE](#), to signup and receive a link prior to all events.

Richard and Marianne Davis traveled to Weldon this last weekend (7/17-18) at the invitation of the Southern Sierra Research Station (SSRS) and Audubon Kern River Preserve. The events were watching birdbanding, and participating in the 25th Anniversary Bird Count for the Kern River Preserve. SFVAS has supported SSRS for their MOTUS system. It was a pleasure to see Edwin Jacobo, PhD, finish his research and become Assistant Manager for the Audubon Preserve! Upcoming events to watch out for include a birdbanding workshop, and a Turkey Vulture Festival!



Richard Davis and Edwin Jacobo at the mist nets



Edwin Jacobo bands a bushtit



Identifying age of Flicker by pinfeathers



Gathering the next morning for the 25th Anniversary Kern Preserve Bird Count

Birdathon 2026

Sending Thanks to YOU

More Teams, More Walks, More Birds, More Donations
We appreciate Your Contributions!



Pat Bates and the Hansen Harriers at Hansen Dam sending their thanks to all of you.

Birdathon 2026 was SFVAS's major annual fundraiser for its environmental education programs. Birdathon creates the opportunity for donors to pledge funds for these programs in different ways—not only in a designated total amount, but also by pledging a specified amount per bird species observed by their selected team of birders.

This year, we added several new teams to the Birdathon events calendar: **Natalie Beckman-Smith**, our incoming Second Vice President led her own walk around the California State University at Northridge (CSUN) campus, a first Birdathon outing for this location. Also new was a team from UCLA, representing the Bruin Birding Club and the Junco Grad Students led by **Joey Diliberto**, a previous scholarship recipient from SFVAS. They also picked a new territory for their Birdathon event: the Glendale Narrows. Thanks Joey and team. It was great to have you join us. And, a third new team led by **Rod Rodriguez**, one of our current Directors-at-Large, took some of his birding buddies to Sheldon Arleta Park, again a new Birdathon Location.

And, of course, we also need to thank the stalwarts who, year-after-year, have consistently volunteered their talent, time, and efforts each spring to bring in the maximum species count (and donor pledges) to bolster our cause.

This year that includes:

Pat Bates, our incoming President and her team at Hansen Dam, the Hansen Harriers.

Charlie Wilken, our incoming First Vice President and tireless tabling master at Aliso Canyon.

Paula Orlovich, our current Treasurer and long-term leader of the SFVAS Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program (SBEEP) who led the walk at O'Melveny Park and co-led a second walk with **Jolene Herz**, one of our current Directors-At-Large at their favorite location in Serrania Park.

Kris Ohlenkamp, who for years led the monthly SFVAS Sepulveda Basin bird walks and used this territory for Birdathon walks, scoring top species counts every year. Kris recently retired from both the Sepulveda Basin bird walks and the associated Birdathon walks although, once again this year, he agreed to support us with a Birdathon walk in his new home territory at Harmon Park.

Muriel and Alan Kotin have led productive Birdathon walks for years and have been very active in soliciting generous donations in support of those walks. These combined efforts have routinely produced a very significant fraction of the overall Birdathon profits. While Muriel has announced her intention to retire from Birdathon, she relented again this year. The Kotins, along with Judy Howell, once again carried out a great Birdathon campaign recording 58 species, the most of any group. Read about it on page 7.

Alexander deBarros, bird-spotter par excellence, current main guide for our most popular monthly walk at Sepulveda Basin as well as Chair for the SFVAS contribution to the Christmas Bird Count took on two walks for Birdathon 2026, one at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area, and one at Balboa Park.

Katheryn Barton, outgoing SFVAS President and her husband **David** who contributes an amazing number of fabulous bird photographs for our website, did their usual Birdathon walk at Malibu Creek.

John Willis and his son have been doing a Birdathon walk for SFVAS for many years. As usual, this has been dedicated to the memory of John's wife Lori Willis.

Thanks to the efforts of all these people, and many of you behind the scenes including specifically our social media team, revenues this year are about 40% increased over the previous two years.

Thank YOU !!

I am attaching a Birdathon 2026 overview table showing the number of species reported by each team leader and the number of unique species reported only by that team and a list of those unique species. This year, more than ever shows that teams with large numbers of unique species are exploring territories off the beaten path. Maybe you can join them next year!

—By Richard Davis, Birdathon Chair

Birdathon 2026 Summary Table

Species#: Number of Species Observed Unique: Species unique to this walk

Location Sheldon Arleta Park Leader Rod Rodriguez Date 1-Apr-26 Species# 35 Unique 4	Unique Species American Pipit Lark Sparrow Savannah Sparrow Western Meadowlark	Location Malibu Area Leader Allan and Muriel Kotin Date 5-May-26 Species# 58 Unique 10	Unique Species Brown Pelican California Gull Elegant Tern Heermann's Gull House Wren Ring-billed Gull Royal Tern Western Grebe Whimbrel Yellow Warbler
Location Harmon Canyon Leader Kris Ohlenkamp Date 18-Apr-26 Species# 46 Unique 6	Unique Species Costa's Hummingbird Hutton's Vireo Purple Finch Townsend's Warbler Violet-green Swallow Western Warbling Vireo	Location Glendale Narrows Leader Bruin Birding Club, Junco Students, Joey Diliberto Date 9-May-26 Species# 49 Unique 5	Unique Species Cinnamon Teal Pin-tailed Whistling Red-crowned Amazon Spotted Sandpiper Vaux's Swift
Location Serrania Park Leader Jolene Herz, Paula Orlovich Date 18-Apr-26 Species# 31 Unique 1	Unique Species Golden-crowned Sparrow	Location Seattle Area Leader John Willis Date 9-May-26 Species# 51 Unique 11	Unique Species Bald Eagle Black-capped Chickadee Blue-winged Teal Chipping Sparrow Common Merganser Downy Woodpecker Hooded Merganser Osprey Pileated Woodpecker Purple Martin Wood Duck
Location O'Melveny Park Leader Paula Orlovich Date 21-Apr-26 Species# 32 Unique 1	Unique Species Peregrine Falcon	Location Malibu Creek St. Pk Leader Katheryn and Dave Barton Date 24-Apr-26 Species# 57 Unique 1	Unique Species Phainopepla
Location Malibu Creek St. Pk Leader Katheryn and Dave Barton Date 24-Apr-26 Species# 57 Unique 1	Unique Species Phainopepla	Location Hansen Dam Leader Hansen Harriers, Pat Bates Date 25-Apr-26 Species# 47 Unique 0	Unique Species
Location Aliso Canyon Leader Charlie Wilken Date 2-May-26 Species# 26 Unique 3	Unique Species Blue-gray Gnatcatcher California Towhee Great Horned Owl	Location Balboa Park Leader Alexander deBarros Date 16-May-26 Species# 46 Unique 6	Unique Species Costa's Hummingbird Hutton's Vireo Purple Finch Townsend's Warbler Violet-green Swallow Western Warbling Vireo
Location Sepulveda Basin Leader Alexander deBarros Date 3-May-26 Species# 54 Unique 2	Unique Species Least Bittern Yellow-cheeked Parakeet	Location CSUN Campus Leader Natalie Beckman-Smith Date 17-May-26 Species# 27 Unique 0	Unique Species

Calendar of Events

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

Reminder: RAIN CANCELS birding events.
Groups of six or more, please contact the leader.

AUGUST 2026

Sunday, August 2. 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@sfsaudubon.org.

Sunday, August 9. Beginner Birding. NOW Second Sundays. 8:00

—10:00 a.m. at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve. (Note earlier start time) We welcome beginning birdwatchers, families, and groups by arrangement. This is a great opportunity to learn how to identify birds, their behaviors, and needs. You will also learn about the outstanding and currently challenged wildlife reserve. Each walk will vary with the interests of the participants. Binoculars are available to borrow. Please do not bring any pets. Wear sturdy shoes, layered clothing, and hat with a brim. Water and sunscreen suggested. Directions: Driving on Woodley Ave. north from Burbank or south from Victory Blvd., go ½ mile 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 small amphitheater which is on the on the south side of the rock-faced buildings. GPS coordinates of parking lot: 34.179942,-118.472595. For more information, call Natalie Beckman-Smith at (818) 926-7825 or San Fernando Valley Audubon at (747) 237-3720. Heavy rain cancels. Please let us know in advance if you are bringing a group of people so we can provide enough leaders. If you have a large youth or special interest group we can try to arrange a walk at a different time to meet your needs.

Sunday, August 16. 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: Kathryn Barton and David Barton. kathy.barton@sfsaudubon.org.



Saturday, August 22. Hansen Dam Birding. 8:00—10:00 a.m. 10965 Dronfield Ave., Pacoima. 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@sfsaudubon.org.

Saturday, August 22. Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve Habitat Restoration. 8:00—Noon. SFVAS is continuing to work with our partners, the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) on the ongoing Habitat Restoration efforts in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve (SBWR). This group gathers every Fourth Saturday morning to work and weed. If you would like to get involved and get your hands dirty, this is for you! SFVAS offers an Audubon guided walk after the work. (Volunteer Walk Leaders always needed.) What is this all about? Please check the [FoLAR](http://FoLAR.org) website for latest details and sign up before attending this event.

No General Membership Meeting August

See you in September!

SEPTEMBER 2026

Sunday, September 6. 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@sfsaudubon.org.

Thursday, September 10. 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@sfsaudubon.org. Co-leader: Mary Lou Sharp.

Sunday, September 13. Beginner Birding. NOW Second Sundays.

9:00—11:00 a.m. at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve. (Note: later start time) We welcome beginning birdwatchers, families, and groups by arrangement. This is a great opportunity to learn how to identify birds, their behaviors, and needs. You will also learn about the outstanding and currently challenged wildlife reserve. Each walk will vary with the interests of the participants. Binoculars are available to borrow. Please do not bring any pets. Wear sturdy shoes, layered clothing, and hat with a brim. Water and sunscreen suggested. Directions: Driving on Woodley Ave. north from Burbank or south from Victory Blvd., go ½ mile 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 small amphitheater which is on the on the south side of the rock-faced buildings. GPS coordinates of parking lot: 34.179942,-118.472595. For more information, call Natalie Beckman-Smith at (818) 926-7825 or San Fernando Valley Audubon at (747) 237-3720. Heavy rain cancels. Please let us know in advance if you are bringing a group of people so we can provide enough leaders. If you have a large youth or special interest group we can try to arrange a walk at a different time to meet your needs.

Tuesday, September 15. Weekday Wander at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 8:30 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.

Sunday, September 20. 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: Kathryn Barton and David Barton.
kathy.barton@sfvaudubon.org.



Thursday, September 24. Zoom General Membership Meeting. 7:00 p.m. Title: Finding Refuge After Fire: Giant Sequoias and Riparian Forests as Critical Fire Refugia for Migratory Birds. Speaker: Edwin Jacobo.

See page 1 for more information. To join the Zoom [click here](#), to sign up and receive a link prior to event.

Sunday, September 26. Hansen Dam Birding. 8:00—10:00 a.m.

10965 Dronfield Ave., Pacoima. 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.



Saturday, September 26. Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve Habitat Restoration. 8:00—11:00 a.m. SFVAS is continuing to work with our partners, the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) on the ongoing Habitat Restoration efforts in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve (SBWR). This group gathers every Fourth Saturday morning to work and weed. SFVAS offers an Audubon guided walk after the work. (Volunteer Walk Leaders always needed.) NOTE: Start time may be subject to change. Please check the [FoLAR](#) website for latest details and sign up before attending this event.



A Fire in the Goat Graze Area —Submitted by Pat Bates 7/3/2026



We miss our hired Sepulveda Basin goat herd, which departed in mid-March for greener pastures. They left the 39 acre graze area with much of the tasty invasive plants—Annual Bastard Cabbage, filaree, grasses, moist thistles—devoured along with the leaves of native Coyote bush and ragweed. Significant portions of dry grasses at the time of the graze were stomped rather than devoured.

Fast forward to Monday, June 29, 2026, after no measurable rain since February, a Radio Controlled turbine model airplane crashed in the graze area and started a fuel-fed fire. The field is adjacent to the Apollo XI model airplane facility, and fires are frequently caused by



the turbines, which carry 1.6 liters and up of kerosene. I was fortunate to be able to meet up with LAFD Incident Commander Battalion 10 Chief Robert Barna and heavy equipment operator Capt. Richard Diede at the scene when LAFD was already well underway in bulldozing firebreaks.

The weather was unusually overcast with a marine layer and low wind. With the active incident in progress and work crews and equipment present, a decision was made to actively burn off some of the adjacent dried grasses and other flashy fuel surrounding the original fire—roughly four acres. The LAFD gladly accepted suggestions to protect native plants in the area, and also to cut hand lines around some biological assets. The backfires proceeded with great caution after a safety meeting and were terminated after the wind became irregular, with perhaps four acres cleared. Any remaining hotspots were put out by fire crews and a water tender and the area was monitored overnight.

Birds—particularly Barn Swallows and Red-tailed Hawks—were crazed during the fire. Undeterred by the smoke and commotion, Barn Swallows were harvesting bugs which were being driven out of the weeds by the LAFD crews and equipment, and Red-tailed Hawks were swooping among the firefighters trying to pick off rodents fleeing the scene! At one point Incident Command was concerned the hawks would attack the firefighters—see photo of angry hawk interested in a mouse under a truck but stuck behind the fence.



Inspection of the area a couple days later revealed interesting findings. Most of what burned was dry grass and some thistle. The native Coyote Bush and Arroyo Willow showed little damage—some effort was put into protecting them. There are large patches (perhaps 50' diameter) of native ragweed and Turkey Mullein in the section—none burned. Interestingly there were relatively sparse tall dried out sections of mustard (mixed Annual Bastard Cabbage and Hirschfeldia) and Prickly Lettuce which did not ignite, despite dried grass burning under them. Many birds were enjoying the area including several Red-tailed hawks, Vermilion flycatchers, and a Loggerhead Shrike. There were scores of Barn Swallows flycatching, and finding treasures in the bulldozed firebreaks.



It is reasonable to assume the flashy fuels that were consumed will not return until the rainy season. The sparse unburned mustards are loaded with seeds, and perhaps a good exercise would be to remove a section to determine whether it reduces the amount germinating. The low intensity of the fire did not result in damage to the native plants present (other than where the jet fuel burned) and will allow them to continue to grow. In addition, it is clear that the ragweed and Turkey Mulein crowd out the invasive grasses, mustards, and thistles. The 75 acre area adjacent to the Apollo XI field has been totally consumed by intense fire every two years or so, resulting in stunted shrubs and proliferating invasive plants, including the newly-invasive annual Bastard Cabbage. Work will continue evaluating the effectiveness of the goat graze, and now the limited controlled burn, with the ultimate goal of dramatically increasing the amount and diversity of native plants, shrubs and trees in this multi-use area.



Beyond the Guide: Learning to Find Owls on Your Own

By Ryan Carter

There is no question that guided birding tours have become a valuable part of the birding community. They introduce thousands of people to incredible wildlife and often provide access to local knowledge that can shorten the learning curve for beginners. Many of the guides I have met are exceptional naturalists who dedicate their lives to conservation and education, and I have great respect for the work they do.

My approach, however, has always been different.

Rather than asking someone to show me where an owl is perched, I have always wanted to understand why it is perched there in the first place.

That philosophy has taken me across more than a dozen states in search of birds of prey. Before boarding a plane, I spend hours researching the species I hope to encounter. I study habitat, breeding behavior, preferred elevations, nesting seasons, prey availability, migration timing, and even the types of trees or landscapes they favor. By the time I arrive, I am not simply wandering through the woods hoping for good luck. I have a plan built around understanding the bird long before I ever see it.

In many ways, the bird becomes the final piece of the puzzle rather than the starting point.

One of the greatest lessons birding has taught me is that birds are remarkably predictable. They live where their needs are met. Food, shelter, nesting opportunities, and safety dictate where they spend their lives. Once you begin thinking like the bird instead of the photographer, the landscape begins to tell a story. Every stand of trees, every grassland, every marsh, and every canyon starts to reveal clues.

The greatest tool a birder owns isn't expensive optics or the latest camera.

It is knowledge.

This mindset has consistently rewarded me. Throughout my travels, I have found roughly eighty percent of the raptor species I expected to see in states I had never visited before. That isn't because I was lucky. It isn't because I hired someone to point them out. It is because I spent the time learning where those birds live and then patiently searched the habitats they call home.

Three owls stand out as perfect examples of that philosophy.

The first was the Burrowing Owl.

Unlike most owls, Burrowing Owls spend much of their lives on the ground in open grasslands and deserts. Instead of searching forests, I searched expansive open country filled with active ground squirrel burrows, fence posts, and low perches overlooking the landscape. Everything about the habitat



Burrowing Owl

suggested the owl should be there. It wasn't long before bright yellow eyes emerged from exactly the kind of place I had expected. The encounter wasn't accidental; it was the result of understanding the bird's ecology before ever stepping into the field.

The Great Horned Owl presented a different challenge.

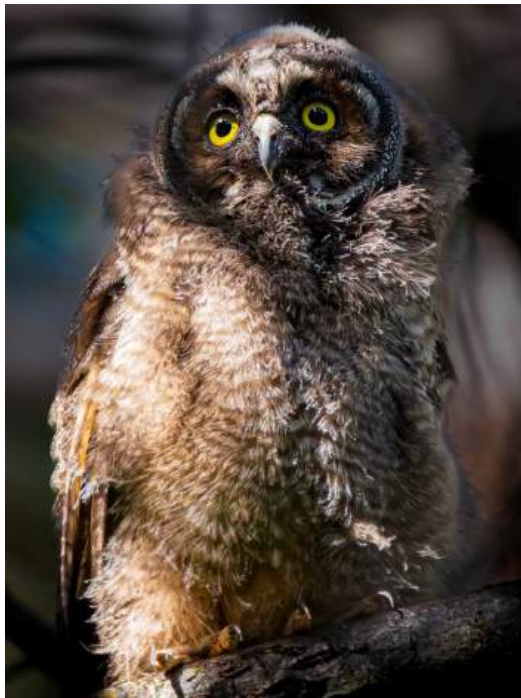


Great Horned Owl

This powerful predator favors mature trees, woodland edges, river corridors, and often nests in abandoned hawk or raven nests. Rather than covering endless miles of trail, I slowed down and studied likely nesting habitat. Large cottonwoods and conifers became my focus. Patience replaced movement. Eventually, hidden among the branches, one of North America's most recognizable owls stared back at me. It reminded me that slowing down is often more productive than walking farther.

Perhaps the most rewarding encounter came with a young Long-eared Owl.

Long-eared Owls have earned a reputation for being difficult to locate, not because they are especially rare, but because they are masters of concealment. Dense (continued next page)



Long-eared Owl

vegetation, thick stands of conifers, and quiet roosting areas provide the cover they depend on. Instead of scanning open skies, I found myself studying shadows, shapes, and subtle movement deep within the trees. When the young owl finally revealed itself, the experience reinforced a lesson that every birder eventually learns: sometimes success belongs to those who are willing to stop searching quickly and start observing very carefully.

These encounters taught me something that extends beyond owls.

Birding is not simply about building a life list.

It is about building an understanding of the natural world.

The more we learn about a species, the less mysterious it becomes. We begin to recognize patterns. Habitat starts making sense. Forests become neighborhoods. Grasslands become communities. Wetlands become thriving ecosystems where every species has its place.

Eventually, you realize you are no longer searching randomly.

You are reading the landscape.

That transformation is one of the greatest rewards birding has to offer.

Guided tours will always have an important place within our community, especially for those just beginning their birding journey or visiting unfamiliar regions with limited time. They provide wonderful opportunities to learn from experienced naturalists and often create unforgettable memories.

But at some point, every birder has the opportunity to take the next step.

Instead of asking, "Where can someone show me this bird?" ask, "What can this bird teach me about where it lives?"

That single question changes everything.

Every successful search becomes a lesson in ecology. Every new habitat becomes a classroom. Every encounter becomes more meaningful because it was earned through patience, preparation, and curiosity.

Over the years, I have discovered that birds rarely reveal themselves to people who are simply passing through. They reveal themselves to those willing to spend time learning the places they call home.

In the end, I don't believe I'll find the birds.

I believe the habitat introduces me to its residents. 🦉

Check Out SFV Audubon Birding Backpacks at Local LA Public Library's

Marianne and Richard Davis dropped off the final 35 SFV Audubon Birding Backpacks to the East Valley Regional Library in North Hollywood, where Ann Bowman (green sweater) was delighted to receive them with her staff. This branch is particularly charming, 1920s era, named for Amelia Earhart who apparently was from the area.

This will make roughly 70+ backpacks that Los Angeles Public Library will be able to deploy in the San Fernando Valley, allowing our citizens to enjoy birding with good binoculars, the Kimball Garrett guide, *Birds of Southern California*, and a few other handy tools for the experience. We will check back in late summer to plan birding presentations at branches just before fall migration.



I AM BUT A SMALL WINGED BIRD
BUT I WOULD CONQUER THE WORLD
- Tiles over fireplace

GO BIRDS!

Allan and Muriel Kotin's 2026 Birdathon Malibu and Environs—Wednesday May 6, 2026

Setting Forth in Muriel's Car: We pulled out of the garage at 7:20. We hadn't seen birds out the window as we were too eager to get organized to look out the windows. It was a cool, sunny spring day, temperature 63°. Immediately after turning onto Zuma Bay Way, the main drag in our development, we found a Dark-eyed Junco (#1) perched on a chimney top. So began our 2026 Birdathon, a 24-hour search for as many species of birds as we can find and identify. Our Birdathon is dedicated to raising money for San Fernando Valley Audubon's Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program (SBEEP).

Continuing down Zuma Bay Way, we found a Song Sparrow (#2) sitting on a Recycled Water sign. We turned onto Westward Beach Road toward the beach. As soon as we reached the beach, a Western Gull (#3) flew past. One American Crow (#4) walked on the otherwise empty beach.

Point Dume: We turned up Birdview Avenue, and a trash truck was closing on our rear bumper, so we couldn't stop on the steep part. Once on the wider, relatively flatter section that passes houses, I drove very slowly with many stops, using the emergency flasher to tell other drivers to go around us. We found plenty of House Finches (#5) perched on utility wires. The early bright sunshine gave them interesting colors, but they were still house finches. As we approached the Pt. Dume Headland we found a pair of Mourning Doves (#6). The preserved wild lands of the headland were quiet. Back near houses, we found a Bullock's Oriole (#7) and soon a California Towhee (#8) on the wires. We saw three Allen's Hummingbirds (#9) perched at various locations on wires too. We don't usually see hummingbirds perch on wires, but we tend to birdwatch in our development and natural areas that don't have lots of utility wires for them to perch on. Highways: We drove several miles on Pacific Coast Highway before we stopped at an opening with a beach view. A Whimbrel (#10), a large sandpiper with a long, down-curved bill, walked on the sand. When we reached the turn onto Malibu Canyon Road, a Red-tailed Hawk (#11) soared and a small flock of Mallards (#12) flew over. As we turned onto the entrance to Malibu Creek State Park, an Acorn Woodpecker (#13) flew onto a phone pole.



Cliff Swallow Posing

8:25 AM, Malibu Creek State Park:

Judy Howell greeted us and showed us that the Cliff Swallows (#14) flying about had many nests in the eaves of the restroom building. Atypically, they were the only species of swallows we saw at MCSP.

A Turkey Vulture (#15) soared high over the park as we walked the road to the Braille Trail. Judy and Muriel left Allan at a picnic table near its entrance to spot birds from there. A Eurasian Collared Dove (#16) flew in and out of the oak grove along the stream. We heard many small birds, many of whose songs the Merlin App identified but we could not and several of which we never saw well enough to identify. One Judy could ID by ear and Muriel could after help from Merlin was

Yellow Warbler (#17). There must have been many of them. One that we could ID by ear and that we finally saw well was House Wren (#18). That was the only sighting of them all day. Wrens are very small birds that pry insects out of tree bark.

After much consulting of bird apps, we figured out that a bird perched on a shrub that sort of looked like a female Blue Grosbeak (#19) was an immature male. Then Merlin confirmed that the loud, distinctive flycatcher call we kept hearing from an invisible bird in the oaks was a Western Flycatcher (#20), known recently as "Pacific-slope Flycatcher."

It is again considered a "Western," the ornithologists having split the species and then re-lumped two subspecies. We were close to where we had found a Pacific-slope in recent Birdathons. A female Anna's Hummingbird (#21) gave us a good look at her emerald green back. The first of several California Scrub-Jays (#22) sat high above an oak. A VERY LOUD racket kept coming from the dense oak foliage along the stream. Merlin assured us that it was indeed a Yellow-breasted Chat (#23). We never saw it but had no doubts about what bird made that racket. Spotted Towhees (#24) sang and sang, hiding. Eventually one allowed us a decent look. Like the much smaller birds, they were much shyer today than typically. Was it because the foliage was denser than usual or another factor? Back to the waiting Allan who was also unable to see the many small birds singing from dense leaves. He got this picture of me following Judy back to his picnic bench.



House Wren Photographed Last Year When They Were Less Shy

Allan pointed out a beautiful Lazuli Bunting (#25) on top of a small shrub. All saw a few California Quail (#26) at several locations on and near the Braille Trail. It was fortunate we saw them at MCSP, as we didn't see them later at "their" place in Zuma Canyon.

Four Nanday Parakeets (#27) flew by squawking. We would find them at our next stop and Zuma Canyon where they often hang out.



Judy and Muriel Arriving Back



California Quail, Female on left

10:30 AM, King Gillette Ranch: Driving across Malibu Canyon road to the nearby Visitor Center of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, we saw a Say's Phoebe (#28) atop a small post, somewhat surprisingly in the warm season. Acorn Woodpeckers and Cliff Swallows were plentiful. The swallows were nesting under the eaves of the visitor center turret. An acorn woodpecker stored an acorn in a presumably inactive swallow nest. We drove on the few roads open and found a pair of Canada Geese (#29) in the creek, along with mallards. A bright male Western Bluebird (#30) perched on a fence. A flock of European Starlings ((#31) flew over a cleared field. Two Common Ravens (#32) soared overhead.

Back at the visitor center, we walked behind the buildings where we found that there actually were two Say's Phoebes. Likely they were a nesting pair. And lower down on the post was a Western Kingbird (#33). That unmowed field must be excellent habitat for medium sized flycatchers. We left King Gillette Ranch and drove to Malibu.



Rock Pigeon – Typically Found Near Humans

11:40 AM, Legacy Park:

This is a small, beautifully maintained park that features native California plants and a small pond. We walked towards the pond which is a bird magnet. Well before we saw

them in and around small trees lining the pond, we heard the racket of Great-tailed Grackles (#34), a large member of the blackbird family. A few of their smaller cousins, Red-winged Blackbirds (#35), flew about and landed in other small trees, making plenty of noise but at lower decibel level. Cliff Swallows gathered mud in their beaks for building nests.

The grass and path along the ocean side of the pond were occupied by plenty Common or Feral Rock Pigeons (#36). People feed them, so they're friendly.

American Coots (#37) abounded, some swimming, others hanging out on the grass with the pigeons and mallards. The adolescent coots were much less aggressive than last year. This may be because there were fewer coots this year.



Male Ruddy Duck – Aqua Bill and Ruddy Body of Breeding Season

Two pairs of Ruddy Ducks (#38) swam in the pond along with other waterfowl.

Another delightful sight was several families of Pied-billed Grebes (#39) on the water. It seemed weird that almost-grown chicks were a little larger than the adults they stayed very close to, probably wanting to be fed some tasty fish.

We left Legacy Park and headed across PCH for lunch at Zinque. On the way, we drove into the parking lot for John's Garden, Lucky's and other restaurants, hoping to see birds that typically hang out where people eat outside. If any were there, they stayed out of view from the driveway or parking.

2:00 PM, Malibu Lagoon: The opposite of last year, the water level was very low, with lots of exposed mud and large, low mud islands. There were huge numbers of birds! We headed toward the viewing area facing the main channel with sweeping views from upstream of the PCH bridge all the way to the ocean. A large college class on something like environmental science crowded the viewing area but let us squeeze in next to the railing. Fortunately, they left after a while. A Great Blue Heron (#40) flew in and landed at water's edge. Dozens of Double-crested Cormorants (#41) rested on the closest mud island in the main channel. Swimming near the PCH bridge was a pair of ducks called Gadwalls (#42). There were hundreds of terns on one of the big mud islands, screeching enthusiastically. A Caspian Tern (#43) flew up and toward the ocean. Most of the resting terns were Elegant Terns (#44). Judy and Allan had their small spotting scopes and we



Loud Great-tailed Grackle, Male

were able to also pick out a few Royal Terns (#45) from the crowd. Two Barn Swallows (#46) flew by, only the second and last species of swallow for the day. A mud island close to the beach held a very large flock of Brown Pelicans (#47). Most rested, a few flying around intermittently. These are likely some of the pelicans we often see flying by from our



Baby Coot – So Cute

great room. There were many gulls on the islands too. The majority were Western Gulls which we tallied early in the morning. We were able to identify the almost black gulls among them as immature Heerman's Gulls (#48), probably recently arrived after hatching in the



Pied-Bill Grebe with Baby Chick

Gulf of California. There were also California Gulls (#49) and Ring-billed Gulls (#50). A lone Western Grebe (#51) swam just inland of the beach. It will probably leave Southern California soon to nest farther north and inland. A Snowy Egret (#52) flew in and landed on the edge of a vegetated island, the first of two snowys we saw there. We were

disappointed that we found no Great Egrets. We walked to the education node and found a Killdeer (#53) on a mud flat rather close to Malibu Colony. We hadn't paid attention to another species but Allan found this photo of a Green Heron (#54) that he took in this area. A delightful surprise.



Green Heron Hoping to Pounce on a Fish

Judy headed to the beach, leaving us and her spotting scope to rest at a bench. She returned, reporting that she found a Black Phoebe (#55), our year-round resident flycatcher, much more common here than the Say's we found at King Gillette Ranch. She also heard the unmistakable call of a Wrentit (#56). Since we all were confident we had also heard one, it was

tallied. We all headed home from the lagoon. The Kotins arrived home at 4:10 PM, having driven 34.5 miles and walked two miles each. Judy obviously walked farther. After I took a needed and refreshing nap, we headed out in my car at 6:15 PM. We drove to the nearby Pavilions parking lot and found House Sparrows (#57) under the two picnic

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Canada Goose | 16. Heerman's Gull |
| 2. Gadwall | 17. Ring-billed Gull |
| 3. Mallard | 18. Western Gull |
| 4. Ruddy Duck | 19. California Gull |
| 5. California Quail | 20. Caspian Tern |
| 6. American Coot | 21. Royal Tern |
| 7. Killdeer | 22. Elegant Tern |
| 8. Whimbrel | 23. Double-crested Cormorant |
| 9. Pied-billed Grebe | 24. Brown Pelican |
| 10. Western Grebe | 25. Great Blue Heron |
| 11. Rock Pigeon | 26. Snowy Egret |
| 12. Eurasian Collared Dove | 27. Green Heron |
| 13. Mourning Dove | 28. Turkey Vulture |
| 14. Anna's Hummingbird | 29. Red-tailed Hawk |
| 15. Allen's Hummingbird | |

tables. Then on to Bonsall Drive, inland of PCH. We drove very slowly, looking for birds on utility wires. It was much less birdy than usual, for whatever reason. We didn't find even a single bird near the unpaved parking lot that serves the Zuma Canyon trailheads. Just before we reached the paved road as we drove out, we got our final new species of the day, a Hooded Oriole (#58). We did see birds already counted, like Nanday Parakeets and House Finches, but nothing else to add to our total count.

Home at 7:20 PM: We got home again in dimming light. We had driven 5.6 miles more for a total of 40.1 miles and the temperature had dropped to 63°, the same as at the start of our search. Our miles walked remained two total. We were pleased and surprised we had managed to identify 58 species of birds!

KOTIN 2026 BIRDATHON BIRD LIST

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 30. Acorn Woodpecker | 45. House Finch |
| 31. Nanday Parakeet | 46. Dark-eyed Junco - Oregon |
| 32. Western Kingbird | 47. Song Sparrow |
| 33. Western Flycatcher | 48. California Towhee |
| 34. Black Phoebe | 49. Spotted Towhee |
| 35. Say's Phoebe | 50. Yellow-breasted Chat |
| 36. California Scrub-Jay | 51. Hooded Oriole |
| 37. American Crow | 52. Bullock's Oriole |
| 38. Common Raven | 53. Red-winged Blackbird |
| 39. Cliff Swallow | 54. Great-tailed Grackle |
| 40. Barn Swallow | 55. Yellow Warbler |
| 41. Wrentit | 56. Blue Grosbeak |
| 42. House Wren | 57. Lazuli Bunting |
| 43. European Starling | 58. House Sparrow |
| 44. Western Bluebird | |



Shadows Cast by Shade Structure Inspired by Kelp in Education Area

Awards Luncheon Recap — by Joanne Millius

San Fernando Valley Audubon held their Annual Awards Luncheon on Saturday, June 6. The luncheon took place at Franklin Canyon Park, a natural area off Coldwater Canyon in Beverly Hills. Volunteers and members were celebrated at the event, and Service and Conservation Awards were presented.

Prior to lunch, the chapter offered two workshops, along with a bird walk. They included a nature journaling class, a photography class, and a bird walk on park trails. Cassandra Cunningham led the nature journaling class. She explored color theory and had students practice plein air painting. A workshop entitled "Photography—Birding with a Camera" was led by SFVAS member David Barton. The session focused on using the camera to improve birding skills. SFVAS walk leader Alexander deBarros led a bird walk on park trails and around the lake—identifying the birds of the park and talking about their natural history.

The buffet style luncheon was catered by Harvest Moon Restaurant, offering many delicious food options.

Chapter honorees were announced after lunch. Charlie Wilken was given the Service Award and the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing was given the Conservation Award.

Charlie has been the Chair of the Outreach Committee for four years. This entails him organizing tabling at various events throughout Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. He has added SFVAS's taxidermy bird collection (produced by former member Art Langton who passed away last spring) to the tabling events, allowing attendees to look at birds of our area up close. The collection has become a major draw at community outreach events. (continued)



Charlie Wilken



Lauren Gill and Joanne Millius

We also presented an award to the Wallis Annenberg Crossing. Lauren Gill, Deputy Director of the National Wildlife Federation, California and the Save L.A. Cougars Campaign attended and accepted the award. She gave an informative presentation on the massive project. The bridge is a vegetated overpass currently under construction in Agoura Hills, at Liberty Canyon. When it is completed (probably January of 2027) it will be a critical wildlife crossing spanning the ten-lane Ventura Freeway. It will connect the Simi Hills with the isolated Santa Monica Mountains. This structure will help preserve biodiversity across the region including allowing a threatened population of mountain lions to cross over to two L.A. area mountain ranges.

SFVAS members Pat Bates and Alexander DeBarros were also honored at the luncheon for their contributions to the chapter. Pat received a certificate for her dedicated work in the Sepulveda Basin, including the facilitation of a 35-acre goat grazing pilot project. Alexander was honored for his work as Chair of the Christmas Bird Count, and for leading bird walks every month in the Sepulveda Basin.

Our outgoing officers received acknowledgement and thanks for their contributions to the chapter. Kathy Barton, outgoing President of the chapter led Executive and Board meetings, oversaw committees, and helped keep the chapter running for the past four years. She gave a speech recapping the 2025-2026 accomplishments that SFVAS has made, and how she appreciated working as President for the chapter. Outgoing officers Rebecca LeVine, Teri Carnesciali, and Pat Bates also served the chapter in their capacity as members of the Executive Board of Directors. Jolene Herz, another outgoing officer, was given a certificate for her work as Web Coordinator.

Representatives from various organizations and schools attended. The California Native Plant Society takes care of plants in the Sepulveda Basin and a member from that organization, George Wadell, attended the event. Our chapter has donated SFVAS backpacks to the Los Angeles Public Library and Shirley Ashe came as a representative of the LAPL. Our chapter has provided scholarships for students at the Moore Lab at Occidental College. One of their graduate students, Alana Pizarro and her husband Evan attended the luncheon. The staff from the Ojai Raptor Center were also invited and Chris Eksteen, Executive Director, Alyssa Torkelson, Director of Development and Fundraising, and Riki Saint John, Development and Communications Associate, attended the luncheon. Woodshop teacher Artur Charkhchyan, from James Monroe Senior High School attended. He and his students have helped our organization build Bluebird boxes that we install and monitor at local golf courses.



Pat Bates, Alexander deBarros, Rebecca LeVine, Jolene Herz, & Teri Carnesciali



Some past and present Scholarship recipients

Councilmember Imelda Padilla and her staff were also invited to the luncheon as representatives of the 6th district which encompasses parts of the San Fernando Valley including the Sepulveda Basin. She was introduced by Pat Bates and addressed attendees at the luncheon. She and her staff have been incredibly responsive to our advice and have turned some of our suggestions into adopted council files. Following months of public outcry over unsafe conditions at the Basin, representative Padilla announced new progress in her office's ongoing cleanup and restoration efforts. At the same time, Mayor Karen Bass addressed the Sepulveda Basin fire and encampment situation by engaging a crisis response team. Without the support the mayor's office, Councilmember Padilla, and the LAFD, the goat graze would not have happened.



Councilmember Imelda Padilla (right) honoring Kathryn Barton and Pat Bates for work in the Sepulveda Basin

Los Angeles Fire Department Battalion Chief Robert Barna attended the luncheon as well. He is in charge of our Southern Valley Battalion 10. Chief Barna has been instrumental in implementing the Sepulveda Basin safety and invasive weed clearance measures. He has set a precedent for looping in community experts on wildlife and vegetation. We believe it was the LAFD's lead on this that led to our inclusion as a trusted advisor. He is also a budding birder along with Los Angeles Fire Chief Jaime Moore.

This year SFVAS had five excellent finalists who received funding to support their education costs and a membership to our chapter. They were also invited to the luncheon as our guests. Three of the students were able to attend the luncheon. Alex Fu, Lord Forde, and Anastasia Shimek. They are all students studying Biology, and are interested in continuing with their studies and contributing to conservation through their fields of choice.

Thank you to the Awards Luncheon Committee members who put all aspects of the luncheon together: Paula Orlovich (chair), Kathy Barton, Teri Carnesciali, Rebecca LeVine, Joanne Millius, and Susan White.



Ojai Raptor Center staff - Chris Eksteen, Alyssa Torkelson, and Riki Saint John

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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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.

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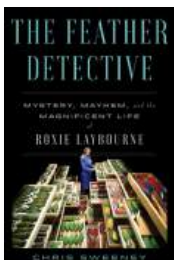
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Book Report - by Marianne Davis

THE FEATHER DETECTIVE: Mystery, Mayhem, and the Magnificent Life of Roxie Laybourne, by Chris Sweeney



As I read this entertaining book, I was reminded strongly of *Lessons in Chemistry*, by Bonnie Garmus. Same strong central woman, totally devoted to her science and career, significantly hampered by disapproving guys around her. Roxie Laybourne was born in 1910 and got really interested in birds and animal taxidermy as she grew up. It was difficult to find a paying job, and she spent quite a while working for nothing in various positions. Even though she faced heavy discrimination due to the sexism at the time (the 1960s), she managed to create new techniques for studying feathers, her lifelong passion. Her personal life was a bit messy, married twice with two sons, and clearly took a backseat to her career, her main life goal. She worked at the Smithsonian as a biologist in the Division of Birds and mentored many in her research techniques over the decades. That expertise became known to the FAA in the '60s, and she consulted with them for years, helping to develop methods to avoid plane bird strikes. She created a new field of forensics in aviation. Even so, her boss felt she was not relevant and dismissed her. She came back through a position as USFW, and eventually simply consulted with whoever wanted to take



lessons in taxidermy with the famous Roxie. Even as she got older and could not come in to work, she would consult at home and worked until she died in 2003. It's quite the story, and there IS a documentary out on her, but I think this story deserves a bigger Hollywood treatment!



Joanne Millius



Bird Sit Bulletin by Mary Lou Sharp

When we gather for our monthly bird sit, our primary focus is on the birds—who we hear, where they are, what they're doing. As we focus on birds, we're surrounded by a wealth of trees, each textured in bark that's as varied as leaves. Each tree's bark is unique, with different sizes, colors, textures, deformations, depth and markings that show us the species as well as the tree's history and individuality. Observation and nature journaling help us waken to the subtle harmony and beauty of these often-overlooked treasures.

THERE IS NO BIRD SIT WITH NATURE JOURNALING IN AUGUST. PLEASE JOIN US THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10 AT O'MELVENY PARK IN GRANADA HILLS. CONTACT TERI CARNESCIALI AT TERI.CARNESCIALI@SFVAUDUBON.ORG TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT.



Roxanne Correa's nature journal