

# the wrenitit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 72 · NO. 4 | APRIL-MAY 2024



Yellow-billed Cuckoo © Luke Tiller

president's perch 

## SPRING MAGIC IS HERE Luke Tiller

Though spring migration truly starts in January and February, with hummingbirds, swallows, and Turkey Vultures among those on the move, it really starts to peak in the next few months. The zenith of species diversity is probably the last week in April, and this is the reason we historically do our Birdathon at that time (more details on page 3).

Spring migration continues all the way into June, with late migrants like **Willow Flycatchers** and **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** rounding out the regular passage birds. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo's incredibly accelerated nesting cycle allows this late migration, with as little as 17 days between them starting incubating eggs and chicks fledging, compared to a month for even the smallest songbirds.

For me, the most exciting part of spring migration is what is known as visible migration (or VisMig if you want to appear Euro-trendy). Some of my favorite birding moments have been spent watching birds just fly past a fixed location, enjoying both the spectacle and the challenge of identifying as they pass by.

Treasured memories include thousands of geese flying over Tempelhofer Feld, an

abandoned airport in Berlin, and almost a million raptors sailing over me in one incredible day in a downtown park in Panama City. Sharing with birding friends a cloud of European Bee-eaters moving along the shores of the Black Sea in Georgia and a mixed group of hundreds of **Hermit**, **Townsend's**, and **Black-throated Gray Warblers** whizzing by at Bear Divide, the narrow pass in the San Gabriel Mountains just outside Los Angeles.

Watching birds migrate is both thrilling



Townsend's Warbler © Tom Mills

and comforting. We wonder how they do it and reflect on an auspicious ritual that has continued for hundreds of thousands of years.

Of course, these birds navigate a myriad of challenges on their journey. Some trials are the same as they have ever been, but many are brought about or exacerbated by us. For that reason, we must focus on understanding these movements to best protect the birds on their path. Thanks to members like you, Pasadena Audubon's grants program has been supporting research of this kind in recent years.

### Birding locally

At this time of year, there's almost no bad place to be birding, but I like to stay as local as possible. To me, an hour spent birding nearby is preferable to an hour spent driving somewhere to bird, and it's environmentally friendlier too.

Generally, in my experience, gloomy cloudy days are good for migration here in the L.A. Basin, while sunny ones are less productive. In those clear days, I might consider wandering a little further afield to the coast, into the mountains or out towards migrant traps in the desert.

## Monthly Chapter Meetings

Get your Zoom link at: [www.pasadenaaudubon.org/meetings](http://www.pasadenaaudubon.org/meetings)

► APRIL 17

**Creating the Gottlieb Native Garden** 7:00-8:30pm,  
Eaton Canyon Nature Center and online via Zoom



The Gottlieb Native Garden is one of Los Angeles' most amazing biological miracles – a stunning one acre native garden in the Hollywood Hills, just a couple of miles from the heart of Beverly Hills. The garden contains more than 200

native plant species and is home to nearly 2,000 species of animals (including 100-plus of birds). Photographer and naturalist Scott Logan will tell us the story of the garden, and show us some of the creatures that call it home.

► MAY 15

**The Parrots of L.A.** 7:00-8:30pm,  
Eaton Canyon Nature Center and online via Zoom

Love them or hate them, the parrots of Los Angeles are here to stay! Although none of the parrots living here are native to the L.A. area, they've had no trouble making themselves right at home, and thriving. As a researcher at Occidental College and head of the Free-Flying Los Angeles Parrot Project, Brenda Ramirez studies the local parrots, doing everything from population surveys to DNA analysis. Join us to learn more about L.A.'s loudest and most colorful residents.

## Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► APRIL 9; MAY 14 7:00-8:30pm

Contact [jamiec.pas@gmail.com](mailto:jamiec.pas@gmail.com) if you would like the Zoom link to attend.

*Cedar Waxwings at Gottlieb Native Garden © Scott Logan*

*Anna's Hummingbird on Hummingbird Sage at Washington Elem. STEM Magnet © Jamie Cho*

## Garden Tour

► APRIL 14

**Theodore Payne Native Plant Garden Tour** 10:00am-5:00pm

Pasadena Audubon's native garden at the Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School (1520 N Raymond Ave, Pasadena, CA 91103) is once again part of the annual event organized by Theodore Payne Foundation, a self-guided tour across greater Los Angeles showcasing public and private landscapes. Our Garden educator, Evellyn Rosas, will be



there to answer all your questions about hummingbird sage, California poppies and fuchsias, and guests may be lucky to spot nests of a mourning dove and a bushtit. The garden will be open to PAS members and those holding event tickets. Get tickets here: <https://nativeplantgardentour.org/>

## Free Bird Walks

Check dates, places, and make reservations at: [www.pasadenaaudubon.org/fieldtrips](http://www.pasadenaaudubon.org/fieldtrips)

Every month we organize half a dozen free bird walks and field trips in Pasadena and beyond. All ages and birding levels are welcome to join us at Eaton Canyon, Hahamongna Watershed Park, and more. PAS members also enjoy free monthly bird walks at The Huntington and Los Angeles County Arboretum, although these spots go fast!

*In April, northbound migrants are the focus as we seek birds on the wing at Bear Divide and new arrivals at spring hotspots such as Hansen Dam.*

## Interested in Volunteering with PAS?

Fill out the Interest Form at <https://bit.ly/volunteerwithpas> to receive our Volunteer Newsletter!



## Social

► APRIL 25; MAY 22

**Birds & Beers** 5:00-8:00pm, Wild Parrot Brewing Co.  
2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena

Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS! Drink up!

## chapter news

# PAS Hires Bird Science Program Director

Educator Kathy Degner has joined the Pasadena Audubon Society's staff as the director of the Bird Science Program (BSP), a successful initiative she helped create in 2018.

A former Board member, Kathy has been an integral part of PAS for over 15 years, particularly spearheading outreach efforts. She is a master teacher and raptor handling trainer for BSP, developed for the Pasadena Unified School District.

"As an educator and nature lover, it has been a dream come true to be able to combine the two while introducing the students to birds and growing good stewards of nature," said Kathy. "To be able to do so at my alma mater and favorite school, Washington Elementary, is the icing on the cake."

Kathy spent 20 years as a speech and language specialist and used every opportunity as a teachable moment to foster a love of wildlife and conservation. She was also



an educational docent at a zoo in Northern California for over ten years and recently became a certified California Naturalist.

When she is not in Pasadena, you might find her up in Morro Bay talking about conservation and the importance of her beloved sea otters as keystone species in the kelp forest ecosystem.

## New Board Member

PAS Board welcomed a new member, journalist Fernanda Ezabella, who has taken the helm of The Wrenit since the last issue. "Being on the Board, I hope to learn more about PAS' endless activities to help me create the best newsletter for our members and community," said Fernanda.

She started her career at Reuters news agency in Sao Paulo, before moving to Los Angeles in 2010 to become a correspondent for Folha de S.Paulo, Brazil's largest newspaper. She is a Golden Globe voter and has covered the Olympic Games since 2016. Before PAS, she was a volunteer and player at the Los Angeles Derby Dolls (but after a few broken bones, she replaced her roller skates with a pair of binoculars and never looked back).





## BIRDATHON IS COMING, APRIL 26-29

Darren Dowell

**B**irdathon is back for 2024! There are many ways to participate, and we hope you will be part of it.

The recipe for Birdathon is simple: the peak of spring bird migration + the enthusiasm and creativity of birders + the generosity of supporters. But we never know quite what concoction we'll get. Sometimes it's trying to see as many bird species in one day as allowed within the limits of the law. Other times it's a gab session with bird counting on the side. In all cases, the goal is enjoyment of the birdiest time of year to remind us of why we made birds an important part of our lives.

### The Ground Rules

**Join or Make a Team** Birding teams will form spontaneously between now and April 15. Information about the teams will be shared through the PAS website afterward.

**Count, count, count** Each team will count bird species within a 24-hour time window, during the April 26-29 period. It doesn't have to be a 24-hour effort, or anywhere close to that; part of a morning or afternoon will do.

**Think Strategy** Each team should devise a theme or strategy, something that will inspire others to support their effort and achievement.

**Make a pledge** Encourage supporters to make pledges

to the teams of their choosing. Pledges are usually in dollars or cents per bird species found, but teams or supporters are welcome to devise other incentives.

**Report and collect** After the Birdathon weekend, all surviving teams will report how they did, then encourage their supporters to pay up on their pledges promptly!

Birdathon pledges and donations are made to the Pasadena Audubon Society to fund our many programs. So while you're encouraging a Birdathon team to excel, you're also funding the Bird Science Program in local schools, the publication of the Wrentit newsletter, bird research with the Motus tracking station, the PAS grants program, informative presentations at the monthly meetings, the Young Birders Club, and more.

Teams are encouraged to recruit non-birding friends and family to sponsor their Birdathon campaigns. Several teams will be small and fixed in number (even one person can be a solo team!), but we also suggest open teams that can add interested members. Each team will need a captain, who will be the main contact with PAS and the Birdathon organizer, as well as a team name.

All about Birdathon 2024 <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/birdathon>

If you're thinking of forming a team, please send us a message at [birdathon@pasadenaudubon.org](mailto:birdathon@pasadenaudubon.org)

Tara Hempstead is a writer, illustrator, and violinist. Check out her work at [www.tarahempstead.com](http://www.tarahempstead.com) and on Instagram: [popt\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/popt_art)

### Interested in forming a team? Some ideas to inspire you:

- A no-holds-barred effort to see as many species as possible in one day
- Strategic placement of lawn chairs to see as many species as possible without walking a single step
- Birding route devised to have margaritas at the final destination
- A day of birding done entirely by foot
- Count only photographed species
- A full morning at your very favorite place to bird

# 78th CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: Surprises, Misses, and Clues About a Changing Environment

Jon Fisher

In a way, it seems the entire year leads up to the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), a singular event for many birders and the Pasadena Audubon Society. Given that, it's hard to believe that the 78th Pasadena-San Gabriel Valley CBC is behind us and in the record books. A good deal of planning and preparation went into making it a success. There were plenty of participants, more than a few good birds, and some surprises as always.

For our count day, December 16, 2023, the weather was mild, clear, and calm. We had good coverage of all our regular locations, and several participants were new to the CBC. Anecdotally, observers commented that below-average numbers of birds were encountered; the data appeared to corroborate this impression.

Hahamongna Watershed Park deserves honorable mention for producing a remarkable list of rare birds, while the usually excellent San Gabriel River suffered noticeably from a lack of water, although that condition was later rectified by some substantial February storms.

Many Neotropical migrants were found on the CBC, including flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. While this is hardly unprecedented, numbers seem to be increasing as a result of climate change in combination with our mild winter weather. This is just one aspect of changing birdlife that is tracked by the CBC.

Another is the presence of many non-native species that have been introduced, either intentionally or as escapees. Numerous parrots and parakeets, Scaly-breasted Munias, Pin-tailed Whydahs, and others are a hallmark of the CBC today. On the 2023 count, we recorded 18 non-native species; over 10% of all species found on the count.

The total number of species found on count day was a respectable 164, though this is well below the count high of 174 in 2018. There were also a dozen “count week” birds: species seen in the three days before and three days following the count. These don't contribute to our species total but are important to record because relatively scarce birds are easy to miss on count day.

Individual birds found were 14,918, a below-average number that reflected the impressions that there were fewer birds present this winter. Typically we find around 16,000 to 18,000 individual birds.

Surprising misses on the 2023 count included Blue-winged Teal and Eared Grebe.

## Here's a look at notable bird sightings on the 2023 Christmas Bird Count, in phylogenetic order:

A single **Ross's Goose** was at Almansor Park, and a **Greater White-fronted Goose** was found at Belvedere Park (Ed Stonick). A count of just two **Green-winged Teal** illustrates the difficulty of finding even relatively common species on count day. Sporadically recorded on the count was a **Canvasback** at Legg Lake (Mickey Long, Jan Long).

Often hard to find in winter, a **Common Poorwill** was in Millard Canyon (Lance Benner). Mild weather makes this species more active and easier to detect.

Among several expected species of gulls was an unusual for the count **Short-billed Gull** at Legg Lake (Chris Stevenson). Also of note was a count week **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia. The latter species is increasing locally.

A nice find was a **Red-throated Loon** at Legg Lake (Layton Pace). This species is quite rare inland and very unusual on the Pasadena CBC.

Rarely recorded on the count these days was a **Virginia Rail** along San Jose Creek (Jon Feenstra). There's simply not a lot of good marsh habitat to attract them.

**Neotropic Cormorants**, both relatively new to the count and increasing over the past decade, were at Peck Road Water Conservation Park (Jeff Hale) and at Legg Lake (Pace).

Not often recorded were a total of 18 **White-faced Ibis**, split between Peck Road Water Conservation Park (Darren Dowell) and the Whittier Narrows area (Pace).

A count week **Zone-tailed Hawk** represented this species which has been slowly increasing in the area.

Nocturnal efforts produced eight **Western Screech-Owls**, two dozen **Great Horned Owls**, and a count week **Barn Owl**.

Often hard to find on CBC day was a **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Mountain View Cemetery (Luke Tiller, Catherine Hamilton).

Empidonax flycatchers overperformed this year. There were two count week **Hammond's Flycatchers**, one at Tournament Park Pasadena and one at Ernest E. Debs Regional Park (Dowell, Otto Mayer), while a very rare wintering **Dusky Flycatcher** was at Hahamongna Watershed Park on count day (Dowell). Count week **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** were at Ernest E. Debs Park (Mayer) and at Legg Lake (Dowell).

A continuing **Cassin's Vireo** was at Hahamongna (Dowell) and another was spotted at Lacy Park in San Marino (Scott Reitz).

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** have had a good fall and winter, with well above-average numbers recorded. Forty-one were found on the CBC 2023. This is a significant contrast to 2022 when fewer than two dozen were found in the entire



Members Mickey Long, Brian Tomikawa, Deni Sinnott, and Jan Long at the CBC Dinner.

Sean Doorly photo.

## What Is Christmas Bird Count?

At 123 years old, the CBC is the longest-running bird survey in the world. It was devised by ornithologist Frank Chapman as an alternative to Christmas "side hunts" where participants competed to shoot as many birds as possible. Now under the auspices of the National Audubon Society, the CBC today has over 70,000 participants in about 2,400 counts, most of these in the United States, but also in Mexico, Canada, and Central and South America. Given the huge amount of data already gathered, the count period will remain the same: December 14 to January 5. Each count picks one day within those dates to conduct its census.



California Gnatcatcher © Luke Tiller

county and none were detected on the count.

Five **California Gnatcatchers** were in the Montebello Hills (Tiller). This species is in peril as its native coastal sage scrub habitat disappears due to development. That said, there are probably a handful of pairs still extant in the Montebello Hills, though access to this area is generally problematic.

A rare continuing **Pacific Wren** was spotted at Hahamongna (Dowell).

**American Robins** had a banner year in southern California last winter, and the count recorded 405 individuals. As expected, numbers were much reduced for this year's CBC with a mere 51 reported.

A non-native **European Goldfinch** was along the Rio Hondo in Rosemead where they are encountered with some regularity (Haresh Satyan).

Rare were a **Swamp Sparrow** along the San Gabriel River (Dowell) and a **White-throated Sparrow** in

South Pasadena (Oliver Huang). In addition, Santa Fe Dam produced three **Vesper Sparrows** (Omar Alui).

A **Bullock's Oriole** along the Rio Hondo in South El Monte was a nice addition to the count (Satyan).

A continuing **Black-and-white Warbler** was seen at Hahamongna. Rare in winter were **Nashville Warblers** at Hahamongna (Dowell) and in the Whittier Narrows area (Satyan). A continuing **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and a newly discovered **Tennessee Warbler** were recorded on count day at Hahamongna (Dowell). Easily missed was a **Hermit Warbler** along the Mt. Wilson Toll Road (Benner).

As always, a big thank you to all the participants, without whom the CBC would not be possible. For the newcomers to the 2023 count, we hope to see you again next year along with more new faces. Our next CBC will be held on December 14, 2024. It seems a long way off, but it will be here before we know it.

Jon Fisher has been coordinating the Christmas Bird Count since 1992. Aside from giving many classes for PAS, he compiles the Los Angeles Rare Bird Alert weekly and authors a column for the Los Angeles Audubon Society newsletter, the Western Tanager. Weekdays find Jon working at Disney Imagineering, where he has enjoyed a 33-year career.

## CBC 2023 in Numbers

14,918

Individual Birds

164

Total species

18

Non-native species

### Surprising appearances

41 Red-breasted Nuthatches (from zero in 2022)

### Surprising misses

Blue-winged Teal and Eared Grebe

### Participants

over 55 participants at 45 sites

### Notable location

Hahamongna Watershed Park: produced a remarkable list of rare birds, such as **Dusky Flycatcher**, **Pacific Wren**, and **Tennessee Warbler**

### Numbers since 1990

**Highest Species Count:** In 2018, 174 species (66 participants)

**Lowest Species Count:** In 1992, 132 species (50 participants)

**Record of Participants:** In 2013, 69 participants (164 species)



Red-breasted Nuthatch © Sam Zhang, Macaulay Library ML301043871





A California Thrasher among California Buckwheat at Lower Arroyo Park, Pasadena.

© Tom Mills

## CALIFORNIA THRASHER *Scythe-billed Songster of the Chaparral*

Carl Matthies

Over the past few months, I've been at Hahamongna Watershed Park more than usual, helping Field Trips chairman Darren Dowell with invasive plant removal, and I've gotten better acquainted with both the landscape and the soundscape.

On the downside, there are quite a few whirlybirds, owing to the nearby police department heliport and periodic medevacs for mountain biking misadventures in the canyons to the north. On the upside, it is brimming with birdsong: buzzing Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, wolf-whistling Say's Phoebes, and jingling Bushtits to name a few. Among the most vocal, however, are the California Thrashers, filling the morning air with their whimsical mimicry.

For such a prominent local bird, I was surprised to learn that the California Thrasher has not been profiled in these pages in at least 20 years. They're not the showiest of birds, mostly grey and brown with a lighter throat and brow, but at just over a foot long, California Thrashers are some of the biggest songbirds around. And then there's all that singing.

Its song is a raspy series of imitations of other birds in the area, interspersed with chirps and whistles of its own. If you're reminded of a mockingbird, that's no coincidence. Thrashers belong to the family Mimidae, which includes the mockingbirds as well as the Gray Catbird, another famous avian impressionist.

But while mockingbirds are known for repeating each plagiarized phrase up to six times, thrashers typically sing doublets or triplets, and to my ear at least, their knockoffs are slightly inferior.

Opinions vary of course.

One step further taxonomically, California Thrashers, like most of their ilk, are in the genus *Toxostoma*, meaning "arched mouth," a reference to their decurved bills. They wield those arched mouths sort of like scythes,

sweeping them back and forth to uncover insects and other arthropods buried in the dirt and leaf litter.

Like last issue's Western Bluebird, California Thrashers do not live on bugs alone. These birds happily partake of the Elderberry, Laurel Sumac, and Toyon that grow in the chaparral they call home.

### Lasting partnerships and mating duets

California Thrashers form lasting partnerships, just as other Mimids. At the beginning of the breeding season, females get into the vocal act, duetting with their mates. The pair also cooperates in constructing dinner plate-sized nests from an assortment of vegetative materials, hidden deep in the shrubs.

Clutches of 2-4 eggs are incubated for a couple of weeks, then tended by both parents for a couple weeks more before fledging. Pairs usually have two clutches in a breeding season, and occasionally they'll have three.

### Habitat loss and fragmentation

It's easy to convince yourself that a big, boisterous bird like the California Thrasher, which can be reliably found year-round if you know where to look, is hunky-dory as a species. Unfortunately, the North American Bird Survey estimates the California Thrasher population has declined by more than half in the last 50 years.

The biggest reason for the drop is self-evident if you look at its range, which extends into northern Baja California, Mexico. California Thrashers' preferred habitat is some of the world's most coveted real estate.

Over time, much of the chaparral and coastal sage scrub they depend on has been lost or fragmented because of urbanization. The habitat fragmentation is especially insidious for birds that require large territories (six acres or more according to Cornell Laboratory) and spend most of their lives on the ground. Preserving large contiguous green spaces, such as Hahamongna, Eaton Canyon, and Deukmejian Wilderness Park, is vital to protecting California Thrashers.



## MY FIRST BIRD FESTIVAL

Jordan Almeda, 12-years-old

I have been a birder for about three years. It all started at my grandparents' home, where they had a bird clock that made a bird call every time it was any o'clock. I used to stare at it all day, waiting for it to make a bird sound. When I finally got one for my birthday, I would call out every bird that I heard on the clock. "Hear that? That's my nine o'clock! A Red-winged Blackbird!"

Curiosity guided me to what I love now. And birding has increased that passion and brought me a deeper knowledge. It also introduced me to new friends and took me to different places, such as my first visit to the Morro Bay Bird Festival this year.

When I visited Morro Bay in July 2023, I was amazed at all the birds around me. When we left, I thought, "Wow, we have to visit again to go birding!" Then, in December, when my mother told me about the festival, my jaw dropped. It was an exciting moment for me. My first bird festival! I opened up Merlin, calling out every single bird in the area of Morro Bay. "Long-tailed Duck?! WOW!"

During the bird walks at the festival, I was astonished by all the wintering species. I never expected to see some of the rarities there, such as a Black Skimmer, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, and yes, a Long-tailed Duck. The biggest surprise was a



Black Skimmer flying over Marbled Godwits and other shorebirds, Morro Bay marina.

© Jordan Almeda

Burrowing Owl, the festival's "mascot". It surprised me to see such a shy owl in the open on Morro Rock, close to a crowd of people.

Apart from a lot of birding on this trip, I also learned the importance of mentorship. I attended a talk with Fiona Gillogly and her mentor, John Muir Laws, an educator and nature artist. She shared her experiences as a young birder around my age and the challenges that came with it. I was able to relate to her and see the importance of that relationship. A mentor can show how to look at something in a different way and, with time, the mentee can also be a mentor to someone else.

Being a young birder is more than looking for birds. It is also following a passion and accepting the challenges, whether it's feeding the hummingbirds, taking photos, or simply birdwatching. After this trip, I can't wait to go to next year's festival!

**The club welcomes young birders of all levels and meets on the first Wednesday of the month, from 5:30 to 6:30pm. Sign up at [www.pasadenaudubon.org/youngbirders](http://www.pasadenaudubon.org/youngbirders)**

## Bob Everett's Wild Wings: A Life's Work of Conservation

Mayra Sánchez

I remember Bob Everett telling us about his darling Barn Owl, "I named her Honey not for her color but for her sweet disposition."

Honey was one of the hundreds of raptors that Bob took care of at Wild Wings of California, the avian rehabilitation center he and his late wife Judy founded and ran for over 40 years from their San Dimas home. Bob would bring Honey and other raptors as ambassadors for conservation to Pasadena Audubon Society's Bird Science Program (BSP) field trips.

Honey was the sweetest. She had a serene presence—even around children—and seemed forbearing with those of us who were less skilled handlers. Other ambassador birds were Archimedes, a Great Horned Owl, two Western Screech Owls both named Thor, and Pirate, a Red-Tailed Hawk.

BSP docents had the opportunity to handle these raptors while we talked to students about interesting bird facts, such as how fast and quietly they can fly, how they hunt their prey, or the head-turning abilities of owls. We also learned from Bob about their rescue stories and how he had gotten to know each of their distinct personalities.

I believe Honey's name says as much about her as it does about Bob's character. The few times I interacted with him, Bob seemed very humble, kind, and compassionate—essential traits for someone so devoted to caring for vulnerable wild animals.

As all things come to an end, Wild Wings closed down last October. Honey and the other birds were moved to other rehabilitation centers.

We are thankful for Bob's decades-long dedication to rescuing and caring for wild native birds, for supporting PAS' education programs, and for helping spread awareness towards the conservation of wildlife and their habitats.



Honey the Barn Owl, with Bob Everett in the background.

© Mayra Sánchez



## BIRD ALLIES NEEDED: Addressing Avian Loss Through Action

Dave Weeshoff, PAS Vice President

My life with birds began in 2005 when I read a *Los Angeles Times* article explaining there was an organization in San Pedro—International Bird Rescue—that was cleaning crude oil from hundreds of local seabirds (grebes, murre, loons) as a result of a natural oil seep off the coast of Ventura.

I started volunteering there and soon became fascinated with the world of birds; their physiology, behavior, habitat, and the myriad of threats to their existence. As a wildlife rehabilitator, I helped treat many species of aquatic birds suffering from broken bones, various wounds, avian diseases, parasites, starvation, loss of suitable breeding habitat, ocean pollution, oil spills, and intentional maiming, mutilations, and gunshots. My next steps were to improve the chances of survival for individual birds and entire species by joining Audubon and other conservation and advocacy organizations.

We love birds because of their diversity, beauty, activities, and songs. We are fascinated by how they live their lives. They are truly amazing creatures. The ultimate demands of flight have been met through 150 million years of evolution, creating unique avian characteristics that make them adept at moving short distances through forests, long distances over open ocean, above and below water—indeed everywhere that offers food and protection for them and their offspring.

Their respiratory, digestion, thermal regulation, reproduction, sensory, cognitive, skeletal, and locomotion adaptations have all been optimized due to their requirements to find food, raise their young, evade predators, migrate, and especially, fly. But these adaptations have fine-tuned each species to require unique habitat characteristics, such as optimum temperature ranges, amount and type of precipitation, availability of suitable nesting sites, options to evade predators, and specific food availability.

And here is where we humans enter the picture. We've created the Anthropocene Epoch—we are dramatically reducing and changing all the habitats (biomes) that birds require—by our actions and the ignorance of our impact on avian friends, as well as introducing additional environmental impediments to their well-being.



Dave Weeshoff works with Brown Pelicans at International Bird Rescue in San Pedro.

Through our individual and collective actions we are changing the climate and weather patterns of our oceans, forests, deserts, grasslands, and polar regions in many ways, and so rapidly that birds cannot cope.

It is impossible to find a place on Earth that is unmarked by human activity. The result? As Cornell University Lab director John Fitzpatrick states, there has been “a staggering loss that suggests the very fabric of North America’s ecosystem is unraveling.”

A recent study reveals we have lost 3 billion breeding birds (25%) in North America over the past 50 years. These impacts affect all birds worldwide through their annual cycles, including migration.

What can we do, as individual Pasadena Audubon members, to mitigate our impacts? In brief, reduce or eliminate the burning of all fossil fuels, plant native species exclusively, use less plastic, use no pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, or glue traps, and keep our cats indoors. Also, be aware of bird window collisions anywhere (and report them to us for remedy).

But we can have an even larger impact by working as a team of concerned bird-lovers. Join our Conservation and Outreach teams to identify and address the larger issues that require collective action and advocacy, including expanding our influence to all communities in our San Gabriel Valley area. To do so, please contact me.

Dave Weeshoff: (818) 618-1652 or [weeshoff@scglobal.net](mailto:weeshoff@scglobal.net).

### Come Talk to Dave!

Dave Weeshoff will be in a series of events talking about bird conservation and his work at Pasadena Audubon and the International Bird Rescue

- April 6; 1:00-4:00pm; Pasadena Sustainability Fair, at the South Pasadena Arroyo Seco Woodland and Wildlife Park: free, <https://tinyurl.com/Davefair>
- April 8; 7:00pm; The Amazing Beauty of our Local Birds, organized by Sierra Club Angeles Chapter. In person at the La Crescenta Library (2809 Foothill Blvd., La Crescenta) or online; free, sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/DavePAS>
- April 21; 10:00am - 5:00pm; Wild for the Planet, Earth Day celebration at the Los Angeles Zoo; Tickets at: <http://bit.ly/davezoo>
- April 27; Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Glendale (closed to the public)



## RETIREMENT PARTY TIME

Deborah Tammearu; photos by Sean Doorly

January 25<sup>th</sup> dawned looking as though it might be another overcast or rainy and chilly day after almost a week of dreary, damp weather. But the rain held off, and the slight chill in the air was no match for the tangible warmth and love that were everywhere to be found in the afternoon Bon Voyage party for our retiring Executive Director, Lois Brunet.

A hundred people came to the campus of the Western Justice Center on South Grand Avenue where the Pasadena Audubon Society office is located. There was yummy food to eat, great fun to be had and wonderful fellowship to be shared. We all enjoyed the music of guitarist and singer Rodrigo Siamarella, and the surprise appearance by Lois' brother, Blake Cambey, and his wife, Chrissie Briscoe. Blake's remarks were funny and loving, and most of all, heartfelt for his sister. There were hugs all around, lots of laughter and more than a few tears as the PAS community gathered to bid Lois a very fond farewell.

Having the party at the Western Justice Center campus was particularly fitting since securing an office after decades of not having our own space was one of the final actions Lois accomplished as ED. And our new office is just one part of a rich legacy. During Lois' tenure, PAS' education and outreach programs became more robust, and we became more connected with other local non-profits working toward common goals collaboratively.

PAS is connected to STEM schools and has a real impact on the lives of hundreds of students. PAS is a much more diverse community now than it was when I joined just over four years ago. The sea of faces, including folks from other neighboring organizations, as well as the wide range of ages were a vivid visual expression of the focused work that Lois has done and the guidance she has offered. All of this, and so much more, grew and evolved under Lois' direction.

No description of the party would be complete without a mention of the person who is truly Lois' partner, her husband, Pascal. I liked to think of Pascal as the official "PAS First Gentleman," as I watched him support both Lois and PAS in countless ways.

And so, to both Lois and Pascal: PAS lovingly wishes you a happy retirement and great birding!



Blake Cambey, Kathy Degner, Chrissie Briscoe, Lois and Pascal Brunet.



Heidi Friedrichs, Ronna Ballister, Emily Allen, Learden Matthies, and Gesna Clarke.



Omar Alui, Russell Campbell, Jared Nigro, George Reich, and Jerry Ewing.





# Rare Hummingbird Finds a 'Field of Dreams' in Glendora

Fernanda Ezabella

If you build it, they will come, right? Since Kristin Joseph replaced her grass lawn with vibrant native plants, her front yard garden has become a field of dreams. A plethora of new visitors started arriving, from birds and butterflies to grasshoppers and praying mantises.

But this winter she welcomed an even more special guest, a rare and colorful Broad-billed Hummingbird, a species primarily of Mexico that normally can be found as north as southeast Arizona.

Kristin, an amateur birder, is a Pasadena Audubon member and a hospital nurse manager. She was on her driveway last February when she glanced at a bird on her Palo Verde tree.

"The coloring, the noise, the whole behavior just seemed different from the rest of the hummingbirds," Kristin told *The Wrenit*. "So I went and got my binoculars. I looked and thought: 'Oh God, this not a typical hummingbird!'"

Since posting the find on eBird, Kristin has seen a stream of people coming every day to her house in Glendora to check out the little guy. "Everyone has been very respectful. And the bird seems pretty comfortable, he will just eat right in front of you," said Kristin, who nicknamed him BB.

### What is a vagrant species?

Darren Dowell, Pasadena Audubon Field Trip chair, took a group to visit BB after a birding trip at nearby Bonelli Park. He said that just three years ago a different Broad-billed Hummingbird



"I was most taken by his overall iridescent colors," said Lynzie Flynn, author of this photo. She lives in Playa Vista, 46 miles from Glendora. "It was absolutely worth the drive. I went twice!" Broad-billed Hummingbird © Lynzie Flynn

spent the winter months in residential Pasadena, a phenomenon called "vagrancy," when a bird shows up in a place far outside its normal range.

"The northern population of Broad-billed Hummingbirds is migratory, leading inevitably to a fraction of vagrant birds which depart from the usual migration routes," said Dowell. "While vagrant Broad-billeds have been observed as far north as Michigan, coastal California is a favored, but still rare, wintering site."

Vagrancy is more common in first-winter birds such as BB, identified as an immature male. "You can see the white patch on his belly, not yet molted into adult blue-green feathers," said Dowell.

BB stayed in his new home for a month before disappearing. He didn't hang out in the feeders, dominated by an Anna's Hummingbird. He preferred to perch in the Palo Verde tree and ate out of the *Salvia* "hot lips" and *Justicia Californica*, natives planted less than a year and a half ago.

Kristin sought guidance from nurseries for help, such as the Theodore Payne Foundation and the Hahamongna Native Plant Nursery, and made use of drought-tolerant landscaping rebates from the city. Her "field of dreams" is now sparking local change.

"Neighbors used to walk down the sidewalk always head down, just looking ahead. I now notice them stopping, slowing down, looking for birds, and paying more attention to the landscape," said Kristin. "Some brought their kids and now they have purchased binoculars."

"I hope that inspires others to think they might be able to do this in their own yard, no matter how small an area they may have."

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**in the next issue of the wrenit:**

Learn about Korean American artist Dave Young Kim and his spectacular bird mural on the USC Pacific Asia Museum wall, in Pasadena. He also has an upcoming exhibition, "Hwajodo: Flowers and Birds in Korean American Art," at Descanso Gardens.

Photo by Meher McArthur



## CONDORS & ALLIES, PART 3: Love and Survival in Baja California

Fernanda Ezabella

Isolated in the high mountains of Baja California, Mexico, Catalina Porras watches an avian soap opera that rivals her own adventures. More than 50 California Condors, charismatic birds known for their complex social lives, provide her with enough entertainment to distract from the daily challenges of her under-resourced position.

“Each one has a unique personality,” said Porras, a conservationist trained in biology and chemistry who has dedicated 22 years to the condors. The native of Monterrey lives in the rugged peaks of San Pedro Martyr Sierra National Park, four hours southeast of the nearest city of Ensenada.

“Some condors are picky and take ages to find a partner. There are the faithful ones who will mourn for years. And there’s one who acts like a gigolo, doesn’t commit to anyone,” she said. “Every day here is a telenovela.”

Catalina has been the coordinator of the California Condor recovery program since its 2002 launch in Baja, alongside biologist and project leader Juan Vargas. The program started as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s efforts to save the condors from the brink of extinction. Today, there are about 300 flying freely in the southwestern US and Baja, up from 22 in 1987.

The Mexican flock consists of 49 birds, plus three awaiting in outdoor pens to be released in the next months, including two juveniles born at the Chapultepec Zoo, in Mexico City. Around 20 have been born in the wild since 2012 in the area and, last February, five pairs were already nesting for the season.

Catalina and Juan met at Fundación Ara, in Monterrey, an NGO dedicated to the conservation of golden eagles, peregrine falcons, and



Juan Vargas and Catalina Porras of the California Condor recovery program.

endangered parrots. When they moved to the national park in Baja, well over 8,000 feet above sea level, they lived in camping tents for six months before upgrading to trailers, once almost buried by three feet of snow.

They came to the mountains as “very good friends” and started dating after three years. “We were left on our own for periods of eight, nine months. It’s a miracle we didn’t kill each other,” she joked.

Since 2010 they have lived in a field station, not that life got much easier. They have to be self-sufficient and ready to fix their vehicles, remove fallen trees from the roads, collect rainwater for domestic use, and even help stop small wildfires. “Any issues we have here, no one will come,” said Catalina, 59. “We are persevering, we would never abandon the condors.”

While Catalina follows the condors through GPS devices, Juan helps feed and guard the outdoor pen, looking out for bobcats, pumas, coyotes,

© Catalina Porras



Condor no. 69 is a “very responsible parent and mate, but he does flirt with other females,” said Catalina. Condor no. 84 is his faithful partner: “She is very sweet and a strict mother.”

and fires. When the weather improves, they head out to check on the chicks nesting in the cliffs of the park, sometimes one thousand feet high. Juan, 65, is an experienced mountain climber and rescue speleologist.

“We expect to retire at some point, but is hard to find people as committed as we are and with outdoor and field experience,” said Catalina. “It’s frustrating. This is not like in the US.”

### How to Adopt a California Condor

Funded by USFWS, San Diego Zoo sends equipment to Baja, such as satellite transmitters and blood test kits for the birds. Additional support comes from different grants and local government subsidies, which are not enough to cover the whole program.

This is why they started an adoption campaign in 2021. Supporting a condor for a year takes US\$ 6,000, an amount that covers the expenses of a team of four people, as well as the operating costs of the facility, such as food, gasoline, and snowmobiles.

So far, 29 condors have been adopted by Mexican private citizens and organizations. They are asked to name the birds and invited to see them in an area off-limits to visitors in the park. They also receive photos and reports of their health and behavior.

To adopt a California Condor or donate, contact Catalina at [contact@imbackbcondor.com](mailto:contact@imbackbcondor.com). For US donors, a tax-deductible receipt is given through the Wild Foundation.

Read about the California Condors at the L.A. Zoo and the Yurok Tribe on *Condors & Allies Part 1 and 2*, on *The Wrenit* vol. 72, no. 2 and 3.

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Consider joining our monthly donor program to provide ongoing support for all our programs and events. Sign up at [pasadenaaudubon.org/donate](http://pasadenaaudubon.org/donate). Dawn Chorus donors receive a beautiful enamel pin designed by PAS' own Patrick Walling and Graham Hamby!



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