

# the wrentit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 74 · NO. 1 | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2025



Sabine's Gulls in Nome, Alaska © Luke Tiller

president's perch 

## Fall Flights and Ocean Finds By Luke Tiller

The phenomenon of migration is one of the things that I find most fascinating about birds. Though spring brings us the excitement of singing birds in their breeding plumage finery, it's fall migration with its cryptic, non-breeding, and immature birds that I find most thrilling.

In addition to the entertaining identification challenges posed by birds in non-breeding plumage, fall offers a higher chance of spotting rarer, off-course species (thanks partially to young birds' propensity to get lost). That's why I try to spend as much of the fall birding as humanly possible.

As well as trawling local parks for birds, the other thing that I really look forward to at this time of year is getting out on a boat and seeing some of the pelagic birds that grace our local waters. Though you can bird by boat any time of the year, the relative calmness of the seas and the diversity of the birds make fall a great time to get out into deeper waters and look for bird species that are rarely seen from shore. Birding on a boat really gives one the feeling of being an explorer or adventurer in a way that most birding doesn't.

For me these pelagic species also really highlight the interconnectedness of the world around us. While some of the deep-water birds we might see off the coast of Southern California in September are following a fairly typical script, like the spectacular **Sabine's Gulls** (photo above) heading south from breeding grounds in Alaska to wintering grounds off of Peru and Ecuador, other birds encountered have an incredibly circuitous journey to Southern California.

The **Sooty Shearwater**, for example, migrates through local waters mainly on the way to breeding grounds in the southern hemisphere on islands off New Zealand during austral summer. The migration of this dark shearwater is one of the longest undertaken by any species and encompasses perhaps some 40,000 miles.

Another regularly spotted bird is the **Pink-footed Shearwater**, also winging their way south at this time to start their breeding season in November on the Juan Fernandez Islands off the Chilean coast.

Not all the birds we see offshore are long distance migrants, with some like the **Black-vented Shearwater** and many of the alcid

having a fairly localized existence. **Scripps's Murrelets** breed on the Channel Islands and roam the west coast for most of their lives, while less common **Craveri's** breed off Baja and rarely stray beyond local Mexican waters and those of Southern California.

Sadly, many of these pelagic birds now live a somewhat precarious existence and that's reflected by how many of them are listed on the **IUCN Red List**. They face several mostly man-made threats that include the usual climate change, habitat loss and impacts of introduced species (at breeding colonies), but you can add oil spills, overfishing and bycatch as part of the fishing industry to the list of problems we need to address too.

By the time this comes to print, I hope there are still a few places left on our chartered boat for you to join me on our **September Pelagic trip**. If not, we hope to have another offshore trip planned for the not-too-distant future to encounter these special birds. On page 5, you can read about our pelagic adventure in May through the Santa Barbara Channel, courtesy of Young Birder Club member Miles Wang.

## Monthly Chapter Meetings

► WEDNESDAY, SEPT 17 7:00-8:30pm, PAS HQ

75 S. Grand Ave., Pasadena

### Mickey and Jon's Bird ID Quiz

Mickey Long and Jon Fisher have presented the annual Fall program for Pasadena Audubon Society since 2002. For year 23, they will again focus on bird identification, with full emphasis on Southern California. They will use photos of birds chosen to clearly show field marks used to separate species. Some are meant to be easy, and some more difficult, but they will take you through the field ID process.

► WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15 TBD, Check our website for updates

<https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings>

## Free Bird Walks

All ages and birding levels are welcome. PAS members also enjoy free monthly bird walks at The Huntington and Los Angeles County Arboretum.

Check dates, places, and make reservations at:

[www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips](http://www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips)

## Dana Point Pelagic

► SUNDAY, SEPT 28 7:00am - 4:00pm

Price: \$135.00 per person

We'll spend time exploring the waters of both Orange and Los Angeles Counties looking for species that are harder to see from just your average whale watch, and chartering the boat will allow us to focus specifically on the birds. Expert pelagic tour leaders will help pick out interesting species.

[www.pasadenaudubon.org/pelagic](http://www.pasadenaudubon.org/pelagic)



## Volunteer

### Heal the Bay's Coastal Cleanup Day

► SATURDAY, SEPT 20, 9:00am-12:00pm

Heal the Bay leads this international volunteer-driven environmental event in L.A. County and organizes over 50 cleanup sites, including Brookside Park, which Pasadena Audubon assists with management.

Sign up at <https://healthebay.org/coastalcleanupday/>

## Social

### Free Movie Night for Members

► FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 5:00-9:00pm

4 Westmoreland Place, Pasadena

The Gamble House & Pasadena Audubon Society present Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). PAS extraordinaires Chris Spurgeon and Jared Nigro will share the wild backstory—technical breakthroughs, Tippi Hedren's horrific filming experience, and Hitchcock's behind-the-scenes struggles. Bring blankets, low chairs, snacks & drinks. We'll provide the popcorn. Raffle tickets (\$5) for film-themed prizes will benefit both organizations. **Free members only event;** RSVP required at <https://tinyurl.com/thegamblehouse>

► SEPTEMBER 24, OCTOBER 22, 5:00-8:00pm

### Birds & Beers @ Wild Parrot Brewing Co.

2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena

Join us for birds, brews, and fun. Catch up with friends, make new ones, and enjoy board games—all while Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS!

## Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► SEPTEMBER 9, OCTOBER 14, 7:00-8:30pm

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

## chapter news

## A BOOK CLUB FOR BIRDERS

By Renée Fabian

It started on the first Friday in October 2024: The Pasadena Audubon Society's newest book club. A group of dedicated readers came together to discuss books related to birds, nature, ecology, conservation, and more. We read a new book each month and then meet to discuss what we read. Monthly meetings are fun, and we learn a lot from each book and from each other.

The group is helmed by PAS Board member Deborah Tammearu (photo), who wanted to start a book club for a few reasons. One of those was to broaden the number of people she met in the PAS community.

"Since I've been a member of PAS, I'm acquainted with essentially the same group of people — the birders I walk with the most," Tammearu said. "There's nothing bad about that, but I wanted to meet some new folks, and this seemed like a good way to do it."

Our dedicated group suggests and then chooses a new book to read each month. These have ranged from bird-focused selections like "What the Owl Knows" by Jennifer Ackerman to books that make you think



about the natural world and our role in it like Elizabeth Kolbert's Pulitzer prize-winning "The Sixth Extinction."

Conversation, shared opinions, and an open ear for differing perspectives takes center stage during each meeting. For Tammearu, this was important from the beginning. "I enjoy hearing opinions and thoughts that are different from my own," she said.

It's also key for members like Bob Hough, especially when considering his top books. For him, criteria include "how many moments of 'huh, I didn't consider that'" books elicit. Hough's favorite book so far is "The Sixth Extinction."

For the upcoming 2025-2026 season, we're looking forward to more engaging reads and meaningful conversations. We're also looking to add new readers to our ranks. "We have a good core of committed readers, but a few more voices would be a good thing," Tammearu said.

**If you're interested in joining the club, send an email to [bookclub@pasadenaudubon.org](mailto:bookclub@pasadenaudubon.org). New members will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis as space allows.**

Check out our Instagram page (@pasadenaudubon) to see members' favorite books so far.



# MEET MICKEY LONG

## A Quiet Conservation Legend of the San Gabriel Valley

By Helin Jung

Newer arrivals to the Pasadena-area birding community may be more likely to know him by name before they ever meet him in person. That's because Mickey Long has been a fixture in the San Gabriel Valley as a preeminent biologist and naturalist since the 1970s, when he began his four-decade career as a steward of Los Angeles County Natural Areas. Here's what to know about Mickey Long:

**He has been doing field work since the mid-1960s**, when he would explore the open areas around his home in Monterey Park. For his notes, he emulated the style of U.C. Berkeley herpetologist Dr. Robert Stebbins. A lover of recordkeeping, Long has transported his handwritten notes to a digital database so that he can respond to requests about the historical ecology of the area.

**He led field trips for school groups** before assuming a larger administrative role at the nature centers. "They got off the bus and were scared. 'Do you have lions here?' They think they're going to the zoo without cages," said Long.

**He helped found the San Gabriel Mountains chapter of the California Native Plant Society.** "I guess I find it strange that people could study animals and plants, then watch things disappear and not become conservationists."

**If he could start over with Los Angeles County's urban plan**, Long would not channelize the L.A. River. "We should have had a quarter-mile buffer at least on each side of the river. No buildings of any kind. We should have started the process of protection 200 years ago."

**His foremost interest in birds is biogeography.** "It's fascinating that you can find the same birds in a certain kind of habitat over and over again. It's just astounding that the same bird will come back from a thousand-mile trip to the same park, five or seven years in a row."

**He still identifies plants by using a key.** "I'm old-school, and I think you learn a little more when you run through the key. The phone [AI] tells you what a plant is but doesn't explain why."

**His connection to PAS goes back to 1972.** He has served on the board in many roles, including as Conservation chair, vice-president, and

president. He also contributed to the Field Trip Committee throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and represented PAS at National Conferences in Colorado, New York, and Monterey.

**The origin of his nickname is a mystery.** "I was born Michael. Mickey came along right away. My mother couldn't quite explain why."

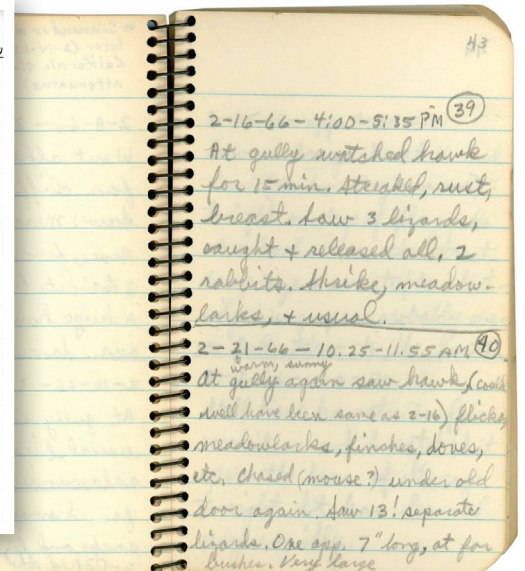
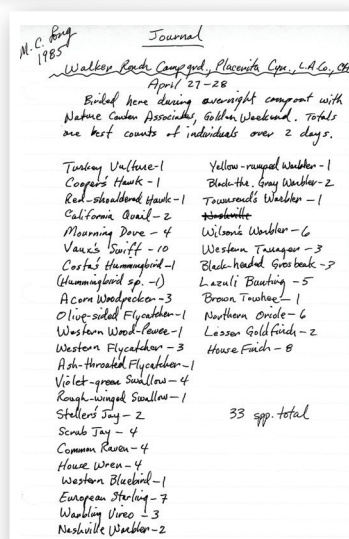


MICKEY LONG IN A BIRD BANDING DEMO AT EATON CANYON, 1997.  
Photo by Cynthia Null



PAS MEETING AT THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT IN 2022. Photo by Sean Doorly

His Journals; The "Gully" was the name for his favorite nature study spot, in Monterey Park. It was a drainage through a slope, at the south end of Orange Ave., not far from where he lived in his teens.





## SOCIAL BIRDERS

Words and photos by Sean Doorly

On June 28th, Pasadena Audubon members gathered for the Annual Members Banquet and Trivia Slideshow—this year at a new venue, the Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena. It was a warm and welcoming space, though we all still miss our beloved Eaton Canyon

Nature Center. Members enjoyed a Mediterranean dinner, drinks, and dessert while reconnecting with friends. PAS Heroes were honored for their volunteer contributions, and the Bird Trivia Slideshow—featuring member-submitted photos—sparked laughs and lively bird talk.

On July 23rd, birders met again at Wild Parrot Brewing Company for our monthly Birds & Beers. With cold drinks in hand, members tackled bird-themed Rebus puzzles and shared stories of recent sightings. Join us on the fourth Wednesday of the month.

### Members Banquet



Wrentit Art Director Patrick Walling and his wife Leslie.



Viveca Sapin and Deborah Tammearu.



Alex Coffey, his partner Valeria Lopez, and their daughter.



The trivia contest is about to begin.



Jared Nigro and Oliver Huang with a photobomb by Carl Matthies.



Happy birders.

### Birds & Beers



Birders deciphering the Rebus puzzles.



Dave Weeshoff and Ira Blitz.



Jared Nigro and Chris Spurgeon are all smiles.





# A Spectacular Feeding Frenzy on High Seas

by Miles Wang, 13 years old



Nearly halfway through our boat trip in the Santa Barbara Channel, the situation was not good. The boat was bumping like a rollercoaster, the wind was quite strong, and there were nearly no pelagic birds around. Then we spotted a huge “smoke” far away.

We were on a day trip with PAS leaders Alex Coffey and Grigory Heaton, last May, aboard the Island Explorer to reach a restricted area of Santa Cruz Island.

The pilot must have also noticed the “smoke” and veered towards it. And as we got closer, jackpot! It was a flock of thousands of birds!

We stopped right next to this feeding frenzy: millions of fish were being chased to the surface by thousands of common dolphins and 20-plus humpbacks. And some 5,000 birds and many sea lions came to join this giant feast.

Covering the skies like clouds were 2,000-plus **Sooty Shearwaters** and several **Pink-footed Shearwaters**. And to make things even more dramatic, whales were popping up their tails in any direction at any time; sometimes, even five of them went up side by side.

It was truly amazing. We didn’t even know where to look. The pilot said it was extremely rare to witness such a huge frenzy even on whale-watching trips.

After all this adrenaline, we still had Santa Cruz Island to explore. We arrived one hour later than expected, but it was definitely worth it.

On the way back, we didn’t see whales again, but encountered the feeding frenzy once more.

There were even more Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwaters, and some of them were so full of fish that they couldn’t even take off properly. Some even got run over by the boat and splashed out of the water in panic mode,

still not able to fly very far.

As we got through all these funny shearwaters, we finally spotted a **Cassin’s Auklet** and two **Scripps’s Murrelets**.

We arrived in Ventura at sunset, and I couldn’t believe my luck with such an amazing and remarkable day trip.



Island Scrub-Jay and California Quail, top: Sooty Shearwater, left, and Island Fox. Photos by Miles Wang.

## Santa Cruz Island

As soon as we got off the boat at Prisoners Harbor, the main target of the trip appeared right in front of us: the mysterious and iconic **Island Scrub-jay**, an endemic species of the island. To my surprise, we saw nearly 20 more scrub-jays as we went through a small private valley with restricted access for the public, owned by The Nature Conservancy.

Although the birds were super active, we were still lacking another Channel Islands icon: the Island Fox.

In the last minutes before boarding back to Ventura, we saw Grigory running out and followed him to the entrance of the restricted area. Under a car, there it was, the cute, tiny **Island Fox**. It completely ignored our presence, allowing us to get great photos.

## Calling All Students!

If you’re interested in birding, a serious birder, or somewhere in between, try out the Young Birders Club. It is free and open to all students.

We have a very exciting calendar of guest speakers and field trips for this school year. Some highlights:

- **Kenn Kaufmann** - prolific author and conservationist will talk about the hidden history of American shorebirds.
- **Ted Floyd** - Birding Magazine editor will discuss his new National Geographic field guide to the birds of North America.
- **Alana Pizarro** - Moore Lab of Zoology ornithologist will give a special tour of the lab and discuss the research being done there.

**YBC meets the first Wednesday of every month from 5:30-6:30pm**, followed by a weekend morning bird walk later in the month. Sign up at <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/youngbirders>

Suggested age range for classes is 8 to 14 years old; bird walks are open to all ages who are willing to walk and bird with a parent or guardian.

## FIELD TRIPS: Alone, Together

Pasadena Audubon's new Field Trips chair explores the value of birding together, inviting you on upcoming free bird walks and new premiere excursions

by Alex Coffey

**B**irding alone can be an escape. A sanctuary. There are few things more pleasant than having a natural space all to yourself. It's calming, recentering, and peaceful. Then, into this quiet, comes a challenge: a bird song never heard before. Or a flash, a glimpse of something in the bushes — just enough to know it's different, not enough to nail down the ID. And as quickly as it came, it's gone.

Most birders are familiar with this exercise in futility. It's also an experience that we all need, as we incrementally uncover the micro-impressions and nuances of species and habitats. It's a very personal journey. But when that growth stalls, or we hit a wall, where do we turn?

My answer: Community field trips.

Before stepping into my role this year chairing Field Trips, a lot of my recent birding was solo. Leading trips was an occasional, but fulfilling, commitment. Over the past six months, I have rediscovered my love of large group birding, particularly with the amazing folks in our chapter. Every trip I lead or attend, I see familiar faces as well as brand new ones; our membership eagerly seeking knowledge, camaradery, and perhaps some geeky reassurance.

At Pasadena Audubon Society, we hold a lot of well-deserved pride for our robust education work through the Bird Science Program, serving

local schools and students. But there is also much adult learning on each and every field trip with our members. I see the “aha!” moments, the photo-sharing, the infectious enthusiasm spread. We are so lucky to have each and every one of you on our trips. If you haven't come out with us lately, I encourage you to check out this month's slate, [www.pasadenaaudubon.org/fieldtrips](http://www.pasadenaaudubon.org/fieldtrips).

Alongside our many free walks and trips each month, our most recent field trip initiative is hosting more “premiere” birding excursions — on average one every two months.

The next is the fast-approaching September 28 Pelagic Trip (check Calendar on page 2). Still a few spots left! And a few other recent examples: May's Santa Cruz Island trip for endemics and pelagic birds (full report on page 7), and June's Kern County Weekend overnight trip. The relatively small financial cost to members for these premiere trips, I promise, is a worthy investment in our leaders' commitment to sharing some amazing birds with you!

Beside the community aspect, I want our trips to enable birders' confidence when they are alone

in the field. At times it can feel lonely, hopeless, even bizarre. “What am I doing?” I recall asking myself in 2005 on a rainy Thanksgiving on the Oregon coastline. After an hour of aimless gawking at distant “gulls sp.” through fogged up, waterlogged binoculars, I gave up. “These birds are impossible,” I thought at the time. It took the helping hands of senior birders of that era to lift me out of my mental rut, and onto some group trips to Connecticut's own gull utopia: the Bloomfield dump. Despite all our time spent alone with the birds, we are in this pursuit together.

I want to thank former Field Trips chair **Darren Dowell**—a PAS mainstay, perennial Board member, and community contributor—for setting a rigorous tone and big shoes to fill with managing field trips. Dowell is a birding powerhouse whose attention to detail and organization in recent years allowed me to step into the role seamlessly. And a huge shoutout to PAS Programs Coordinator **Carl Matthies**, without whom we simply would not have the framework to set up trips each month.

I look forward to seeing you out in the field sometime this Fall. Good birding!

**PAS August Ballona Creek Walk had a stroke of good luck coinciding with a rare Bar-tailed Godwit sighting. 21 attendees + leaders Alex Coffey and Kevin Lapp**





## A United Flock Takes Wing in Montreal

Our correspondent and Programs Coordinator reports from the 2025 Audubon Leadership Conference in Canada

by Carl Matthies

There were plenty of reasons to feel down in the dumps about the global state of affairs when I headed to Montreal for the 2025 Audubon Leadership Conference in mid-July. But I was feeling excited and very fortunate to have the privilege of representing Pasadena Audubon Society at a gathering of fellow bird-lovers from Alaska to Patagonia and everywhere in between.

The conference theme was **Soaring, Together**. The cynic in me thought this might prove to be an empty slogan. In fact, it was a perfect metaphor for the bridges Audubon National has been busy building and for the spirit that permeated the entire event. The organization's stated goal is audacious in its simplicity: **"To have a hemispheric impact in bending the bird curve"** from declining to increasing numbers. Well before it was time to part ways, the sense of unity and shared purpose was palpable.

The tone was set at the first dinner when Audubon officials and Canadian dignitaries were given the floor to talk about progress on bird conservation in the host nation. Jeff Wells, Audubon's vice president for Boreal Conservation, has, along with government agencies and other non-profit organizations, been brokering agreements with indigenous peoples to take the lead on sustainable stewardship of their lands. The **Seal River Watershed Alliance (SRWA)** is a fruit of these negotiations.

A joint initiative of four First Nations in Manitoba Province, SRWA is working toward the permanent protection of 12-million acres of wilderness. When you think about Canada as the North America's bird nursery — the place where so many migratory species rear their young — this is thrilling news.

Domestically, faced with an administration that is patently disinterested in maintaining, much less enhancing, the federal government's commitment to bird conservation, National Audubon has been working hard to recruit the next generation of environmental stewards through its campus chapter program.

Started in late 2019, the program now boasts 100 campus chapters, including UCLA, Cal State University Channel Islands, and San Diego City College in Southern California.

At the conference awards banquet, **Gwendolyn Cain** was honored for her exemplary work as faculty leader of the campus chapter at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Cain gave a rousing speech in which she reminisced about camping trips with her parents in the national parks as a young girl, and how the beauty of the landscape and the wildlife they experienced together made an indelible impression, leading to decades of environmental advocacy. She received a thunderous ovation.



Most (but not all!) of the sizable California Delegation at the 2025 Audubon Leadership Conference in Montreal, Canada, gathered for a photo before the Awards Banquet. The author is in the back row, third from left.

### From Mexico to Chile, Proyecto Conserva Aves

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Audubon's focus has been on **Proyecto Conserva Aves** (The Conserve Birds Project. Good to know there was no time wasted in trying to come up with a clever name.) But by any name, the project itself is unprecedented in scope and scale.

Stretching from Mexico to Chile, its aim is to acquire close to 8,000 square miles of prime bird habitat for conservation and to improve management of another 8,000 square miles in existing preserves.

Again, the emphasis is on giving local communities and indigenous peoples agency in protecting the migratory and resident birds they share the land with. Conserva Aves benefits from the cooperation and expertise of two like-minded NGOs, BirdLife International and RedLAC, the Network of Environmental Funds for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The project also benefits from a substantial capital investment from the **Bezos Earth Fund**, which has provided \$12M in seed money and is prepared to commit up to \$10B more toward the purchase and management of selected sites.

Is this a substantial investment of Mr. Bezos' wealth, especially given his business empire's contribution to climate change and habitat loss to "fulfillment centers"? No, not really. But it's still a lot of money, it could do an awful lot of good, and there are great people on the ground from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, etc., working hard to ensure that it does.

The most important knowledge that I brought home, the wind beneath my wings so to speak, was that Pasadena Audubon Society is not working in isolation. We have many friends, and we're a part of something very big: A movement to secure a prosperous future for birds, for their benefit and for everyone alive and yet born, to reap the joy of their presence.

## THE CANARY'S WARNING

PAS vice-president and Conservation chair writes on the urgent fight to protect science and nature amid regulatory rollbacks by Dave Weeshoff

For many years my personal mantra was taken from Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*: "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." Recent executive actions in Washington D.C. have caused me to transition to "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness."

We've always used the term "Canary in a coal mine" to represent an indicator of a potential hazard or a harbinger of danger. And our love of birds and our knowledge of their dinosaur characteristics yet again gives us insight into how various threats emanating from the rollback of many environmental regulations will affect the world we live in.

Birds, like humans, require clean air, clean water, suitable and abundant food resources, and what I call a "Goldilocks" climate. And, since many species migrate, these requirements must be met across many latitudes, indeed the world.

Over the years the United States has enacted various laws to regulate activities to protect the environment for the benefit of humans and, as a by-product, protect essential biological resources necessary for wildlife survival:

- 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- 1940 Golden and Bald Eagle Act
- 1969 National Environmental Policy Act
- 1970 Clean Air Act
- 1972 Clean Water Act

While these laws have served us well in preserving precious bird habitat and enabled their overall wellbeing, the current administration has taken myriad actions, legal or not, to bypass these laws and grant, indeed encourage, much wider opportunities for the extraction industries — oil, natural gas, coal and lumber — to ravage the nation's land, water and air, with minimal protection of the biosphere of our nation and, by extension, the world.

These immediate and comprehensive executive actions, due to their denial of anthropogenic climate change, threaten all life forms on our planet, which have evolved to thrive in a relatively stable environment. These actions have abruptly ceased all activities which study, advocate for, provide solutions for, and mitigate the catastrophic effects of rampant and accelerating anthropomorphic climate change.



And, notoriously, the current administration has very quickly and dramatically reduced the ability of our amazing scientific community, including colleges and universities, to find answers and solutions by defunding important projects in all scientific disciplines. These actions will not only stifle current projects, but rapidly end the United States' long established position of global scientific leadership.

Pasadena Audubon Society will do as much as we can with our resources to fight the good fight against this incredibly short-sighted, ignorant attack on the viability and strength of our scientific institutions. We are monitoring the activities of numerous other non-profits in their fight for the reestablishment of our scientific institutions to their prior strength and will support them whenever we are able. We ask for your encouragement and support.

Let me be clear, to quote Winston Churchill: "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

As usual, please call me at (818) 618-1652 to chat or email me at [weeshoff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:weeshoff@sbcglobal.net) about conservation, advocacy, climate change, wildlife rehabilitation, window strikes, etc.

Dave Weeshoff (right), Carl Matthies, and Carl's dog Curly (not pictured) at a Pasadena 100 rally for carbon-free energy back in January.





## BINS TO GHANA

### Curiosity Meets Conservation on a Lagoon's Edge by Guoping Huang

On a luminous June morning in Akosua Village, on the southern coast of Ghana, the edge of the Muni-Pomadze Lagoon stirred with unusual energy. The lagoon, a designated Ramsar site recognized internationally for its ecological importance, is home to hundreds of bird species and forms a vital part of Ghana's coastal wetland system. But on this day, it wasn't just the birds that brought it to life—it was the voices of children discovering them.

A group of schoolchildren, dressed neatly in uniforms, spread out across an open field with binoculars hanging from their necks and holding bird identification cards. "Pied Kingfisher!" one boy shouted, pointing eagerly to a black-and-white silhouette perched on a nearby branch. Around him came more excited calls—"Little Egret!" "Long-tailed Cormorant!"—as the lagoon's rich avian life revealed itself, species by species, through the thrilled eyes of youthful curiosity.

Just a few dozen yards away, their parents and family members, many of them lifelong fishers, quietly went about their daily work. Some sat mending nets, others dried the morning's catch in the sun. A few paused to observe the scene: their children, who would usually be in a classroom, were clearly engaged in something new and inspiring.

Akosua is a small fishing village located on the narrow sandbar between the Atlantic Ocean and the Muni-Pomadze Lagoon, right next to the city of Winneba. For generations, families here have relied on the lagoon for artisanal fishing, mangrove harvesting, and salt-making. Like more than a hundred coastal lagoons across West Africa, Muni-Pomadze has long served as both a source of livelihood and a foundation of cultural identity. But these lagoons are increasingly under threat. Across the coastal region of the Gulf of Guinea, rapid urban expansion, untreated waste, and climate stress are undermining their ecological balance.

Just 40 miles north, the once-thriving Korle Lagoon near Ghana's capital, Accra, has now infamously earned the title of "the world's most polluted waterbody". It's a tragic transformation over just a few decades, driven by unchecked urban waste, industrial runoff, and informal plastic recycling operations processing imported waste from developed countries like the United States.



Ramsar Site Manager Vivian Aye-Addo (center, back row) and her team from the Forestry Commission pose with schoolchildren from Akosua Village Primary School. Author Dr. Guoping Huang is pictured first on the left in the back row.

That's why mornings like this one in Akosua matter so deeply. When children learn to recognize a Pied Kingfisher not just as a name on a card but as a living part of their world, they're learning more than birdwatching—they're learning stewardship. They begin to see the lagoon not as a neglected edge space, but as a place of meaning, memory, and future possibility.

This powerful learning experience was made possible thanks to the Pasadena Audubon Society, which in early June launched a successful flash fundraising campaign, enough to purchase 10 binoculars. They were donated to the Forestry Commission in Winneba, the agency responsible for managing the Muni-Pomadze Lagoon. The donation has already expanded local environmental education efforts, bringing conservation awareness into both classrooms and the surrounding landscape.

On this special morning, Vivian Aye-Addo,



James Aryee-Bortsie, head of Akosua Primary School, encouraged his students to use the bird identification cards to help identify different species. The Muni-Pomadze Lagoon and Manku Mountain are pictured in the background.

the Ramsar Site Manager, and James Aryee-Bortsie, head of Akosua Village Primary School, announced a new initiative: the creation of a wildlife club at the school. Their goal is to make birdwatching and ecological awareness a regular part of village life, and not just a one-day event. In time, these students might grow into eco-tourism guides, helping to diversify the local economy beyond resource extraction. Others may become foresters, teachers, or simply thoughtful citizens who understand the value of protecting their natural heritage.

To all the donors who made this vision possible, thank you! Your generosity will be appreciated by generations of students from Akosua, Winneba, and beyond, as they come to cherish the natural beauty of the Muni-Pomadze Lagoon.

Dr. Guoping Huang is an Associate Professor at the University of Southern California. He has collaborated with the local community in Winneba as a researcher and volunteer planner for the past 10 years. He and his students helped deliver the binoculars. His son, Oliver Huang, created the *Guide to the Birds of Muni-Pomadze Lagoon* to accompany the donation.

### Thank you, Vortex

We want to thank Vortex Sports Optics and Donald Ditzenberger at the company for their help with our latest "Bins to..." programs. They helped us stretch our donations with some non-profit pricing on their optics for Bins to Bolivia (more on February-March issue of *The Wrenit*), and Ditzenberger donated a few pairs of the Vortex Bantams to our Young Birders Club, which we realized were the perfect binocular for the kids in Ghana. The Bantams are a great introductory binocular for young people generally: balancing size, quality of optics, and pricing.

## FLYING HOME

### How Birding Reconnected Me with Brazil

by Fernanda Ezabella

As a Brazilian bird lover, I'm a little ashamed to admit I don't know much about Brazilian birds. My birding journey started once I moved to the U.S., so every time I fly south I must make up for lost time. And that's exactly what I did in June and July. My expeditions into the vast countryside made me fall in love with my native land again.

I grew up as an urban kid in São Paulo, the biggest city in the Americas. Little did I know that my namesake state boasts some of the largest remaining fragments of Atlantic Forest. I didn't have to fly to the Amazon to see cool birds. I just drove a bit. And by the way, it's much more expensive for Brazilians to fly to the Amazon than to Disney World.

So in this first of three articles about Brazil, I will take you birding in São Paulo state (the next articles will be about the people saving the Lear's Macaws in Bahia and the Grey-breasted Parakeets in Ceará, two endangered birds whose populations are growing).

Our first stop in São Paulo was the Intervales State Park, and I want to set the scene describing the craziest sound I ever heard from a bird: a sharp whistling growing louder and louder, like a bomb about to drop in our heads. The bird was a **Sharpbill**, one I never saw, but will never forget.

Intervales holds historical weight in Brazil's birding scene as the first spot where international birders arrived in the 1990s. Birding remains a niche among Brazilians, even though we have the most diverse avifauna in the world after Colombia and Peru.

mini-showers, appreciated by many colorful **tanagers** (**Black-goggled**, **Sayaca**, **Blue Dacnis**). The lodge also has forest trails, where we saw a family of Buffy-tufted Marmosets, a critically endangered monkey.

In a nearby marsh, we got a glimpse of the elusive **São Paulo subspecies of Marsh Antwren**, a black bird with fewer than 200 individuals left in the wild. It appeared briefly after we used playback, and the guide didn't repeat it to avoid disturbing it further.

Our final stop was Itatiaia National Park, on the border of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais states. From the Swiss-style chalets of Hotel do Ypê, perched at 4,100 feet, we watched **Dusky-legged Guans** roam by day and spotted a **Tawny-browed Owl** by night.

Some birds were heard more than seen. One of the most poignant calls came from the **Black-and-gold Cotinga**, whose melancholy sound was described by English naturalist Ernst Holt in 1928 as "a cry of a suffering creature of the forest."



Dusky-legged Guan



Gilt-edged Tanager, left, and a Blue Dacnis.



We stayed inside the park at Pousada Lontra overlooking a serene lake. In one day, we saw four owl species, including a couple of **Long-tufted Screech-Owls** sleeping during the day. Another highlight was a **Blue-bellied Parrot**, a psittacine that sings like a thrush.

Next, we headed to Macuquinho Lodge in Salesópolis, only 70 miles from São Paulo city. The place was built by birders for birders, with perfect settings for photography. Feeders in the garden attracted several species of **hummingbirds**, such as the striking **Scale-throated Hermit** and the **Brazilian Ruby**. A cinematic fruit feeder featured mirrored water and

In the weeklong expedition organized by **Brazil Birding Experts**, we registered 263 species with the help of our guide Carlos Otávio Gussoni, one of the country's top ornithologists. Often, the true spectacle was watching him work, his ear attuned to every chirp of the forest.

As the only Brazilian in the group of five tourists, I learned the bird names in English, but please, if you ever go, ask for a few local names too, as they are much more creative. I'm sure you will never forget "little giggles" (**Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet**), "scrap metal" (**Chestnut-bellied Euphonia**), and "big-headed Mary" (**Large-headed Flatbill**).



## Jodhan Fine to Strengthen PAS Community Connections

Occidental College graduate and lifelong birder steps into newly created staff position

Pasadena Audubon Society is happy to introduce Jodhan Fine as the new Community Engagement Liaison, a position created to increase exposure and accessibility to our work and mission. He will use his role to help people connect with their inner environmentalist and reach the community at large.

Fine is no stranger to PAS members. He's been an assistant director with our Bird Science Program since September 2024 and is a constant fixture at our Birds & Beers and other social events.

After a lifetime in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he moved to Los Angeles to attend Occidental College. Four years later, he graduated with a degree in Urban and Environmental Policy and a minor in Biology, completing a senior thesis on environmental access disparities.

Between graduation and his new PAS position, Fine spent his summer as an urban conservation intern with the Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy. He has had the pleasure of dabbling in numerous fields as an ecological researcher doing lab and field work, and an occasional writer and editor for numerous publications.

Fine is an avid birder whose interest was sparked by a birdwatching club at his middle school. Birding has been one of the best, most life changing parts of his life, and it has taken him to numerous continents and across the vast and mountainous western United States.

Knowing opportunities such as a birding club are rare, Fine recognizes the great privilege he had and wishes to create similar experiences for more people. For him, increasing exposure to nature is not only a necessary step for people's health and environmental equity, but also an essential conservation tool.



Photo by Helin Jung

Jodhan Fine operates a table at the Bird Science Program's Birdfest last November, with PAS taxidermy and specimens from the Moore Laboratory of Zoology.

When not working or studying, he is probably looking for birds or other wildlife. As a religious user of eBird and iNaturalist, he loves documenting his sightings and contributing to citizen science efforts, as well as creating nature content on social media.

Fine has fallen in love with Los Angeles and cares deeply for his community. He's incredibly honored and excited to begin work with PAS. You can contact him at: [jodhanf.pas@gmail.com](mailto:jodhanf.pas@gmail.com).

## PAS Board Welcomes New Members

### Meet Alicia Di Rado, Publicity Chair

Alicia Di Rado is a communications and public relations professional specializing in telling stories about science, engineering, medicine and university research. She lives in Pasadena and enjoys working as a speechwriter for the chancellor at UCLA, while dreading her long commutes to Westwood. One plus: She works across the street from an eBird hotspot.

On the side, Di Rado consults for clients who need writing, editing and strategy for websites, magazines, press releases, SEO and digital marketing. An avid hiker, trail runner and native Californian, she loves the outdoors, which is why she became a UC Environmental Stewards California Naturalist. She leads iNaturalist bioblitzes and volunteers as a camera trapper and wildlife identifier for the Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy. Spanish was her first language.



### Meet Irene Takako Farr, Member at Large

Irene Takako Farr is a policy advocate that works with communities statewide on California's most pressing climate issues. She has worked on a range of policy areas, including air quality, ocean science, water management, wildfire, clean ports, and waste management. In her current role at Better World Group Advisors, Farr brings expertise in environmental policy research and implementation.

She earned her master of Urban and Regional Planning from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and holds a bachelor's in Environmental Science from Santa Barbara City College and UCLA. Farr is particularly passionate about the human connection with birds, supporting the rights of nature, and to expanding community access to nature and birds. She is a hiker, camper, and emerging bird watcher.



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Building like birds! At Kidspace Children's Museum, summer campers learned the secrets of nest-making from PAS' Helin Jung, Jared Nigro, and Jodhan Fine, and then spread their creative wings with special build-your-own-nest kits.