

the wren tit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 74 · NO. 5 | JUNE-AUGUST 2026



Great Horned Owl © Luke Tiller

president's perch 

A Warm Thank You By Luke Tiller

It's a bittersweet experience writing your last newsletter article as President of Pasadena Audubon Society. I joined the organization over a decade ago after being talked into becoming program chair over a beer at a previous incarnation of Birds and Beers all the way back in the summer of 2015. A pretty good investment on the part of previous President Deni Sinnott, I think, given my 11 years of service.

It's an organization I believe in passionately, and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time with the group, having fulfilled a couple of different roles at the organization prior to becoming president, including program chair (booking our monthly meeting speakers) and field trips chair (liaising with our multitude of wonderful field trip leaders and planning many of our fun adventures). That said, I think it's important that nonprofits see turnover among their boards to stop them becoming stale, to allow fresh ideas to blossom, and I'm excited to see where leadership takes Pasadena Audubon next.

PAS has gone from strength to strength in those 11 years, going from a local bird club to

a community organization with a strong focus on birds, birding, education, advocacy, and conservation. Over my time as President, we've grown exponentially, especially during the post-Covid birding boom. I'm proud of how we've developed both in terms of membership and as an organization overall, and I hope we have retained the welcoming approach that lured me into the organization.

We've been blessed with so many wonderful members and volunteers and have benefited from some generous financial support too. This has allowed us to do so much more than many chapters have the capacity for and has allowed us, with your support, to give back to the local community, the birding community more generally, and helped us support those making their way in the world of bird research and nonprofit careers, something that feels particularly important in current times.

My years on the board have not always been easy ones either personally or when looking out at what has been happening across the globe more widely. But without the comforts of birds

and nature and the camaraderie of friends made through Pasadena Audubon, they certainly would have been much tougher. I hope that PAS brings a similar amount of joy to you and has played and continues to play a similar role in your life.

There are so many people to thank, including all our wonderful volunteers, but I'm especially indebted to the many hardworking board members who volunteer so much of their time, enthusiasm, and incredible expertise into making the organization run as smoothly as it does. If it wasn't for them, or my partner Catherine, it would have been a tougher undertaking.

Though I'm stepping down as President, I am not going away completely. I'm just looking forward to focusing on doing the things that I really love most about the organization—going to the rejuvenated Birds and Beers and leading a few of our wonderful field trips. It's been a pleasure to meet so many of you over the years at

Continued on page 2

calendar

June Chapter Meeting

► WEDNESDAY, 6/17 7:00-8:30pm, via Zoom

An Evening with Ted Floyd

Details and Zoom link at www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings

Free Bird Walks

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

Check dates, places, and sign up at: www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► JUNE 9, JULY 14 7:00-8:30pm (No meeting in August)

Contact pasadenaudubon@gmail.com if you would like the Zoom link to attend.

Annual Banquet and Trivia Slideshow

► SATURDAY, JUNE 13 6:30-8:30pm

Mijares Mexican Restaurant; 145 Palmetto Dr., Pasadena

Spend a summer evening with us at this family-friendly event and enjoy a delicious banquet. We will have a heartwarming recognition of our dedicated volunteers with the PAS Heroes Awards and our fan-favorite bird photo trivia slideshow! Tickets are \$60 per person and include dinner, drink, and dessert.

Buy tickets here: <https://bit.ly/PASbanquet>

Social

► WEDNESDAYS, JUNE 24, JULY 22, AUGUST 26 5:00-8:00pm

Birds & Beers

Wild Parrot Brewing Co., 2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena

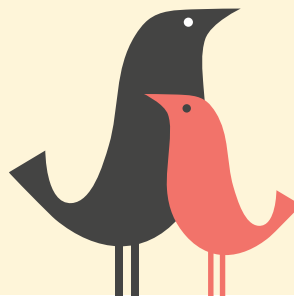
Join us for brews, birds, and fun. Catch up with friends, make new ones, and enjoy board games, all while Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS!

► TUESDAY, JUNE 30 5:30-7:00pm

Birds & Non-Alcoholic Beers

Burden of Proof, 1012 Mission St., Pasadena

Join PAS for Birds and Non-Alcoholic Beers at Burden of Proof in South Pasadena! For members who like their beverages alcohol-free, please join us for a special summer treat. Stop by and have a delicious, refreshing non-alcoholic treat with your fellow birders while supporting a small, local business.



president's perch

A Warm Thank You

Continued from Page 1

our myriad different events, and I look forward to meeting more of you in the coming ones.

As for the upcoming birding season, summer is typically something of the birding doldrums for me. This year though, and the following four, it's going to be one of the most important birding times of the year, as it's going to be a critical time to get out there and look for evidence of breeding birds to bolster the statewide California Bird Atlas effort. If you haven't signed up already, the perfect time to sign up is now. Get out there and get involved. It's the perfect way to give back to birds by helping document the places that are important to them throughout the state.



chapter news

Master Birder Program – Grab Your Spot ASAP!

This is a rigorous, advanced course for proficient birders who are ready to up their skill level. Led by Jodhan Fine, this 12-week course offers a curriculum dedicated to a wide variety of field trips, intricate bird identification, conservation stewardship, and national/international birding tips.

There is one weeknight class and one weekend field trip every week for the 12-week period, with 75% attendance required. Tuition is \$1,300 per person. PAS is offering a 50% discount scholarship to one student.

For more information, contact: Jodhan Fine at jodhanf.pas@gmail.com and Jared Nigro at jaredn.pas@gmail.com



Photo: Sean Doorty

PAS Grants Committee Oversees Record Disbursement by Carl Matthies

In early March, the Pasadena Audubon Grants Committee issued its annual request for grant proposals to fund research projects, community-based programs, and travel to ornithology camps and conferences. Five weeks later, the committee convened to determine the awardees among more than two dozen applications.

Ultimately, the committee disbursed a record \$37,033 to fully fund eight research proposals and one travel grant by drawing from surpluses in other parts of the budget and a private, earmarked donation.

Below are brief descriptions of the proposals that were funded.

Sierra Glassman: "Do songbird populations undergo divergent genomic adaptation to heterogeneous urban environments?"

No previous study has used historical DNA from museum specimens to understand how populations change with urbanization. Using modern and historical DNA from four city populations and two wildland populations of Dark-eyed Junco, we will examine demographic history, genetic connectivity, and differences in environmentally linked loci between populations. This will increase our understanding of how environmental variation and disparities in environmental justice influence the emergence of genetic adaptations and the trajectory of urban wildlife evolution.

Kelsey Reckling: "Investigating the effects of artificial lights at night on migratory departure timing in Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows"



With the rapid expansion of urbanization and artificial lights at night (ALAN) comes increasing challenges for migratory birds. Using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, I will examine how ALAN influences the spring migration departure timing and movement of Gambel's

White-crowned Sparrows overwintering in Southern California. This research fills a major gap in migration ecology by testing how artificial light alters spring migration timing in a Pacific Flyway songbird.

Russell Campbell: "How habitat change shapes behavior and success in Pacific Coast herons"

Differences in plumage color of Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets are linked to distinct behavioral strategies and habitat requirements, meaning one species may

be better suited to changing environments than the other. Through field surveys, I will track population size, reproductive success, and movement patterns. Additionally, a field experiment using heron decoys will test how herons respond to the presence of other birds in different habitat types. Together, these approaches will identify the crucial habitat features for herons, revealing how behavior and appearance interact to shape where birds live and forage and informing conservation strategies for wading birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Tania Romero: "Dietary structure of western warblers during spring migration in Southern California"

Using fecal DNA metabarcoding, my project investigates the dietary components of seven warbler species passing through Southern California during spring migration to identify how warblers partition food resources, if any, during this life cycle period. This grant will fund the dietary analysis of two warbler species: Yellow-rumped Warbler and MacGillivray's Warbler. This research addresses key temporal and biological gaps in Western warbler migration ecology and natural history and advances our understanding of resource partitioning across life cycle periods.

Joseph Curti: "Assessing spatial and altitudinal variation in artificial light at night across urban Los Angeles"

Artificial light at night (ALAN) continues to increase across these landscapes, likely exacerbating impacts to native species. To date, nearly all ALAN research has been collected in two dimensions. To address this important limitation, we propose using unmanned aerial vehicles (i.e. drones) to measure light pollution in three dimensions. With this method, I can model how light pollution interacts with different facets of the built environment to generalize across urban areas in California and potentially at much larger spatial scales.

Devon DeRaad: "Testing whether the Island Scrub-Jay is entering an extinction vortex"

I have shown in previous work that the Island Scrub-Jay has much less genetic diversity than the mainland counterpart. It's unclear whether low genetic diversity is a natural result of long-term isolation or a warning sign that the Island Scrub-Jay is losing genetic diversity and headed for extinction. To distinguish between these two scenarios, I will sequence DNA from Island



Scrub-Jay specimens collected around a century ago for comparison to DNA from modern Island Scrub-Jays.

Sean Lyon: "Apocalypse now: How do territorial hornbills respond to fire and floods?"

Extending my previous work on birds in this region, I will GPS tag Southern Ground-Hornbills in Mozambique from neighboring social groups across different habitat



types to understand how group size and territory quality may affect their resilience in our changing world. The GPS

trackers will collect data on how the birds' territories shift with annual flooding, and how they respond, both in the moment and over time, to wildfires. Findings will broaden our understanding of how territorial species respond to losing access to foraging sites under increasingly variable climatic conditions and provide a comparative system to California's wildfire-prone landscapes by showing how a taxonomically distant species responds to fire.

Maeve Secor: "Mechanisms, development, and genetics of structural white coloration in California Scrub-Jays"

My research focuses on the developmental and genetic mechanisms underlying avian coloration, with the goal of understanding how novel plumage phenotypes arise through modifications of shared biological pathways. The proposed project builds on my preliminary work demonstrating structural white coloration in California Scrub-Jays. With support from Pasadena Audubon Society, I can complete the transcriptomic component of this study, a critical step in linking nanoscale feather structures to genetic regulation during feather development.

Vicky Bai: Travel grant for Hog Island Audubon Camp

I'd like to use the scholarship money to subsidize a trip to Monhegan Island Bird Camp. As a data scientist whose research and interests have focused on large-scale avian datasets, visiting a migratory hotspot like Monhegan Island would allow me to observe the biological reality of migration and better understand the variables and conservation challenges that shape the data I analyze.

Photos, left to right:
White-crowned Sparrow (Gambel's) © Donna Carter ML656689355
Island Scrub-Jay © John Dumlao ML654459886
Southern Ground-Hornbill © Konrad Enderlein ML656821363

PAS Seeks Presidential Nominees

The Pasadena Audubon Society Board of Directors seeks candidates for the organization's next President. This is a volunteer officer position on the Board of Directors, for a renewable two-year term beginning October 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028. The President works closely with the Executive Director, Board Members, and the general membership to fulfill the following responsibilities:

Providing strategic leadership, vision, and guidance to help Pasadena Audubon Society grow and flourish.

Attending and engaging with members at PAS social events, such as monthly meetings, the June Banquet, Christmas Bird Count, New Members Reception, and Birds & Beers.

Presiding over all Board meetings and directing all general Board matters, along with fellow Board members and committee chairs.

Alongside the Executive Director, overseeing all organizational matters including staff, programming, and budget.

Promoting fundraising efforts to donors and members.

Sharing perspectives with membership via the "President's Perch" column for each issue of *The Wrentit*.

Candidates should submit their resume, as well as a statement of their interest in the position, to presidentsearch@pasadenaudubon.org. Please include in your statement:

Describe your previous or active engagement with Pasadena Audubon Society

Describe your leadership experience in professional work or with a nonprofit organization

Describe your interest and experience with birds, birding, or conservation

The Nominating Committee will recommend qualified candidates to the Board, which in turn will present final candidates to the membership for vote at the September 2026 general meeting.

If you are interested or have follow-up questions, please email the PAS Nominating Committee at presidentsearch@pasadenaudubon.org. Materials for interested persons must be received via email by July 15, 2026.

Book Ends

Wrapping up the second semester of PAS Book Club

by Deborah Tammearu

The PAS Book Club has started our summer break, with the next session set for this coming September 4, and we have now enjoyed two years of companionable reading.

We are an eclectic group of various ages, interests, passions, and professions. Conversations are never dull; they are always lively, respectful, and insightful. We share a lot of laughter. Like so many experiences in our lives, reading is subjective, and having almost a dozen viewpoints brought to the table has often given me an "aha" moment, seeing something from another's point of view.

We began our shared reading adventure with "What an Owl Knows" by Jennifer Ackerman, and have just closed this year with a classic: "The Edge of the Sea" by Rachel Carson. In between those two books, we've read about and discussed caracaras, hummingbird rescue and rehabilitation as well as ecosystems, to name just a few topics. We even encountered an archdruid along the way.

Two books that seemed to evoke the most heartfelt discussions were "The Comfort of Crows" by Margaret Renkl and "North Woods" by Daniel Mason. Both of them seemed to strike deep chords within all of us. Another book, "Twelve Trees" by Daniel Lewis, inspired two of us to take road trips: one to wander among Coast Redwoods, the other to find Bristlecone Pines.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE NEXT CHAPTER

Our group meets once a month, September through June, on Friday mornings. That obviously does not work for everyone's schedules. Convening another group—another chapter?—that would accommodate different life/work patterns is something I hope can happen. Meetings



Photo: Deborah Tammearu

could take place in the evening: "Tapas and Tomes," anyone? Or, they might occur in the mornings on the weekends—"Books and Brunch?"—following early morning birding, of course.

If you would like to get such a group off the ground, please let me know. It's not difficult, the guidelines are simple, and the rewards of being in the company of other book lovers are tremendous. I would be happy to help you get started, and if you are interested or would like to know more, just email me: bookclub@pasadenaudubon.org.

Birdathon 2026: Could Five Committed Birders Find 100 Bird Species in One Epic Day?

by Alicia Di Rado



Birdathon 2026 was fun, enriching, and grueling. But mostly fun.

Five intrepid birders known as the Arroyo Ramblers met at the Gabrieleno Trail near the Jet Propulsion Lab at 5 am on April 26 with the lofty goal of finding 100 species.

It was more than a personal challenge. Every species we counted during Birdathon brought in pledges for Pasadena Audubon.

After hearing a few **owls** and a **Common Poorwill**, we set out to survey Hahamongna Watershed Park. Darren Dowell, Carl Matthies, Learden Matthies, Andy Jacobson, and I observed 74 species there, including a **Yellow-breasted Chat** as well as a **Zone-tailed Hawk** and several **Whimbrels** flying overhead.

Then we made the critical decision to head to the San Gabriel Mountains. We drove to Chaney Trail and walked along Mt. Lowe Road and the Sunset Ridge Trail through the Eaton Fire burn scar. Signs of fire were obvious in the blackened trunks around us, but so was regrowth.

Along the way, we encountered three cooperative **Lawrence's Goldfinches** and a tree bursting with **warblers**. Andy happily spotted some elusive **Mountain Quail**. And we all especially enjoyed what Carl described as a “lively show” put on by a pair of chatty **Red-breasted Nuthatches**.

However, several of us ached with every step. “For the last couple of miles, my feet were throbbing so bad I thought my hiking boots were going to rip open at the seams,” Carl said.

I made the mistake of wearing new boots and developed a blister, and we had surprisingly chilly moments in the mountains.

We returned to our cars at 6:21 pm, ending more than 13 hours of birding across 21.9 miles and 3,600 feet of elevation gain. Our tally: 99 species. (Agonizing!)

The results smashed the previous Arroyo Ramblers record of 95 species set in 2023 during the team’s first year. Unlike that effort, which included a few birds seen at feeders, every one of the 99 species this year was observed or heard along the route itself (with two picked up while driving between stops). We also broke a team distance record.

The team raised about \$5,500 for PAS and raised their bird IQ by sharing knowledge while also building friendships. “I learned a lot about the people that I birded with,” Andy said, “and that was the enriching part.”



The Arroyo Ramblers from left to right: Carl Matthies, Learden Matthies, Darren Dowell (back), Andy Jacobson (front), and Alicia Di Rado

Photo: Andy Jacobson

Arroyo Ramblers by the Numbers

Species found: **99** Miles traveled: **21.9**
Hours in the field: **13** Money raised: **\$5,500**



Red-breasted Nuthatch, coyote, and vista © Alicia Di Rado

Creating Community in SoCal

Recapping the Southern California Council of Audubon Chapters meeting

On Sunday, March 8, Pasadena Audubon Society was the host for the Southern California Council of Audubon Chapters. This was an exciting event because it was the first in-person SoCal Council meeting since the pandemic. The day-long meeting kicked off with some quick birding around Occidental College and a tour of the Moore Lab taxidermy and skins collection.

Later, the Council got down to business at The Gamble House’s meeting room. The local Audubon Chapters gave updates on their organization’s current status of successes, goals, and hurdles. Many discussed similar issues such as birding accessibility, entering into the social media landscape, connecting with a more diverse demographic, and protecting bird habitats.

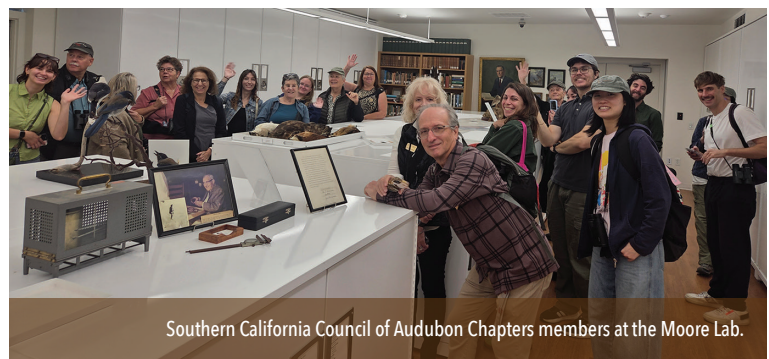
Sea & Sage Audubon noted that they are currently tackling the issue of window collisions because many of their headquarter’s neighboring buildings have large windows. They asked if Pasadena Audubon would be interested in collaborating with them this summer to find a solution to this issue. They were inspired by the window film work done by PAS’s Helin Jung at the Audubon Center at Debs Park.

Tammah Watts, CA Audubon Advisory Board member, and Rachel Bailey, Community Building Manager for Audubon CA, led the meeting and offered thought-provoking topics for break-out sessions.

The day finished with a presentation from Van Pierszalowski, Executive Director of California Bird Atlas. Van shared on the progress

of this exciting project and how each Chapter can help support the mission of building a lasting resource to protect biodiversity for birds.

As the day concluded, members from each Chapter in attendance shared contact information and hugs. There was a feeling of hope and empowerment in the air. It’s an important reminder that we are all working toward the same goal and creating a lovely community along the way.



Southern California Council of Audubon Chapters members at the Moore Lab.

Again, It's Climate Change

And how we can all work toward a brighter future for the birds by Dave Weeshoff, PAS Conservation/Advocacy Chair

While chatting with friends, relatives, and visitors to our tabling activities, I explain there are 11,167 (as of this writing) bird species on our planet. I then explain that anywhere there is any kind of food at all, there's also a bird there to eat it.

All birds have evolved over millions of years to physiologically specialize on food options depending on where they live. For a historical example, the few bird species that withstood the great Chicxulub asteroid of 66 million years ago seem to have survived because they ate seeds in the soil since other foods—insects, plants, trees, and other dinosaurs—were incinerated in the cataclysm.

So based on documented history, we know that all bird populations are influenced by the abundance and stability of their preferred food sources, and the abundance of that food is based on the environment (climate) wherein the sources evolved—also over millions of years.

Here is where we humans come in. By burning huge quantities of natural gas, oil, and coal (fossil fuels) we are dramatically changing the various environments (biomes) where we, along with all bird species, are dependents. The birds—and even humans—cannot adapt, mitigate, or evolve as fast as their habitats and food sources are changing. Scientists have understood the impacts of increasing carbon dioxide levels in our atmosphere for well over a hundred years, and yet we continue to argue the scientific facts.

With this understanding, for four years Pasadena Audubon Society has been a member of “Pasadena 100,” a collective focused on why and how the City of Pasadena should develop,

But what else can Pasadena Audubon Society and its members do to support our avian friends? In summary, each of us could reduce our carbon footprint. That is, for starters:

- Reduce our water usage
- Reduce our use of gasoline/diesel
- Convert our natural gas appliances to electric
- Install solar panels
- Reduce our use of plastic in all its forms
- Plant native plants in our gardens

Information about all of these topics is now readily available via such organizations as National Audubon Society, Project Drawdown, Yale Program on Climate Change Communications, Citizens Climate Lobby, Climate Reality Project, and Break Free From Plastic, among many others.

The urgent need to achieve international goals to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel consumption is now amplified by recent international activities. These events have dramatically shown how an interruption in the pumping and movement of fossil fuels negatively impacts everything from international trade and nations' economies to food security, living standards, housing, transportation, human health, climate refugees, and overall peaceful international relations.

And lastly, as citizens, we must seek to understand critical issues such as anthropomorphic climate change, and vote accordingly.

As usual, if you have any questions or comments regarding Conservation or Advocacy topics, please contact me, any time, any day at 818-618-1652 or email at weeshoff@sbcglobal.net.



internalize, and implement a clean-energy future. Changing to a 100% carbon-free power source for its residents is the most effective action Pasadena can take to address the climate emergency. We are proud of the results Pasadena 100 has achieved and continue to support the organization wholeheartedly.

Tracing the Origins of Pasadena Audubon Society



by Ira Blitz

In 1850, America's natural resources appeared inexhaustible. Nature was to be conquered, not protected. Women's hats were being made out of bird feathers and even dead birds. Contests were held by hunters at Christmas to see who could shoot the most birds. Ornithologists, taxidermists, and museums all contributed to the loss of wildlife.

The effect on bird populations was evident, and in response, the first Audubon Society was formed in Boston in the late 19th century. These trends were also noted in Pasadena and just needed a spark to ignite a vigorous response. That spark occurred one evening in March 1904.

W. Scott Way was in his eucalyptus grove in Altadena when he heard gunshots ring out. Investigating, he found that hunters had piled an express wagon high with Mourning Doves, taking them to market. Outraged, Way vowed at that moment to form a society for bird protection.

On March 23, 1904, Way placed an announcement in the Pasadena Evening Star for a meeting to address the issue. This took place on March 25, 1904, at the Board of Trade located on Colorado just off Fair Oaks. "All lovers of birds" were invited to attend. Over 40 people came.

The stated purposes of the organization were to prevent the killing of birds, to lobby for bird and wildlife protection laws, to discourage the wearing of feathers, to provide education in public schools regarding bird conservation, and to encourage the study of native birds.

At the meeting, bylaws were adopted and temporary officers appointed. Another meeting was planned for the following week at the same place to form an Executive Committee.

W. Scott Way became the Secretary/Treasurer of the new organization, then called the Audubon Society of California, the first in the state. Garrett Newkirk of Altadena, a dentist by profession but passionate about the protection of birds, became Chairman and later the first President when that office was created in 1908. Elizabeth Grinnell, mother of the soon-to-be-famous ornithologist Joseph Grinnell, became Vice President.

Other Audubon societies soon formed in California, and a new name was needed to distinguish the one in Pasadena from the others. The new name, chosen in 1909, was the Pasadena Audubon Society (PAS).

PAS was founded as a reaction to the wholesale slaughtering of birds by hunters. Conservation of



The intersection of Fair Oaks Avenue and Colorado Boulevard in 1905.

bird life and interesting children in bird studies was the focus. Meetings, usually in someone's home, consisted of a lecture or study about a particular bird together with refreshments and music.

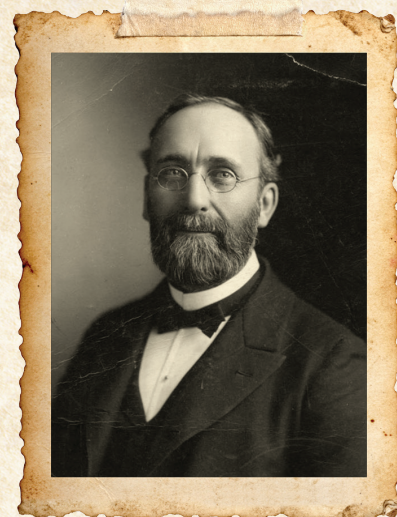
The modern concept of birding was not part of the picture. In fact, although founded in 1904, PAS did not even have a meeting outdoors until April 17, 1909. This occurred in the Arroyo Seco. Twenty-two bird species were seen, the most notable of which was the Russet-backed (Swainson's) Thrush.

With the development in the early 20th century of binoculars suitable for birding, and of appropriate pocketable guidebooks, birding as a pleasurable pursuit became possible.

On May 26, 1911, PAS had its first actual bird-walk—seven years after it was founded. PAS member Mrs. H. W. Myers invited all interested to join her in a bird "ramble" (i.e. a walk taken for pleasure). Thirty-five people went on this trip. No record of where this took place or of birds found is known to exist, possibly due to the loss of PAS records in the 1993 Eaton Canyon fire.

However, we have Laura B. Daniels, PAS member and curator of the Pasadena Historical Society, to thank for what information we have. In 1938 she made a summary of the first 25 years of PAS, which she read to the Society on August 25, 1938.

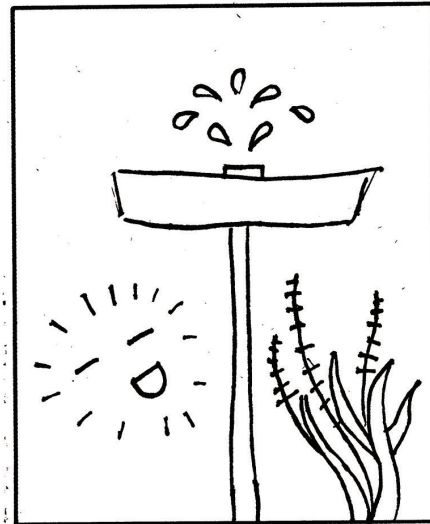
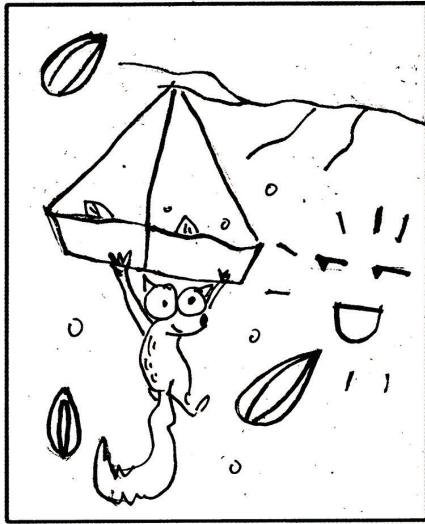
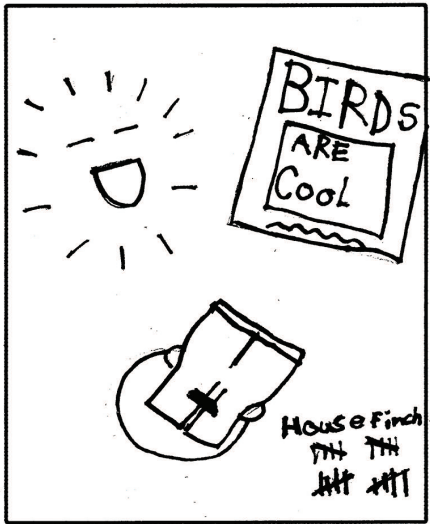
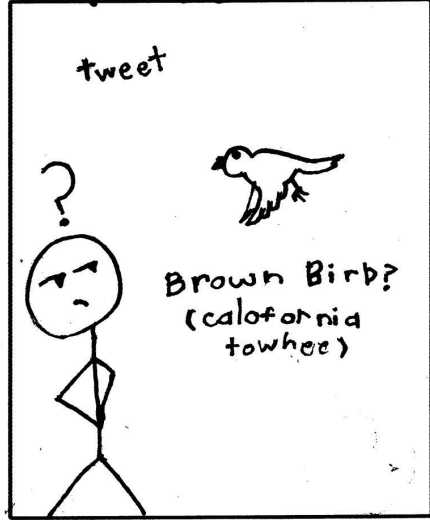
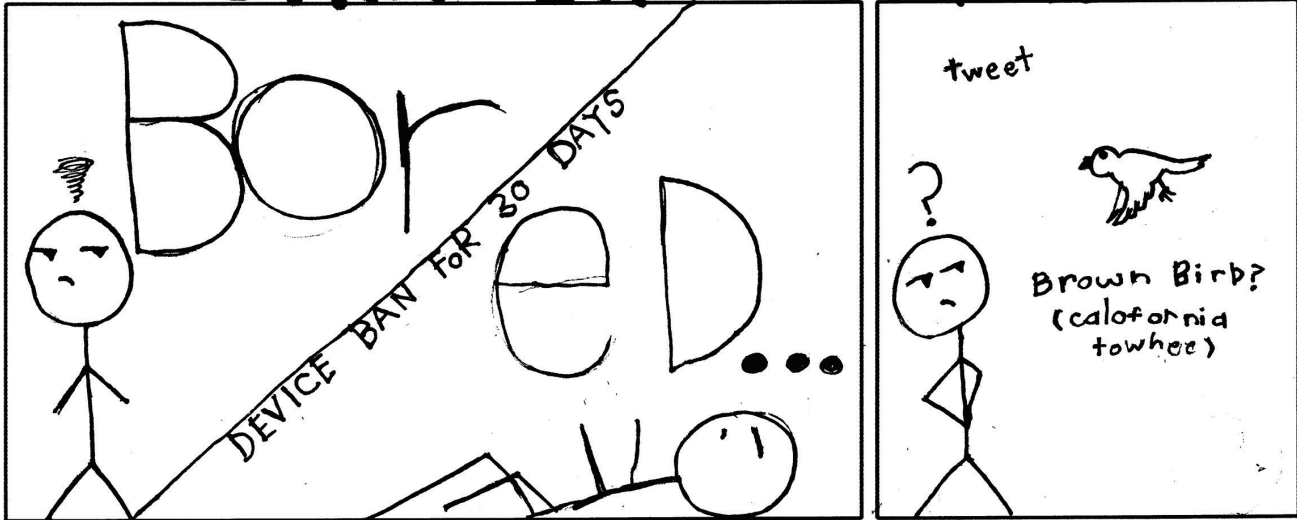
The late Don Rogers and the Pasadena History Museum were the source material for this brief outline. This article combines pieces that originally appeared in 2015, 2016, and 2024 editions of *The Wren Tit*.



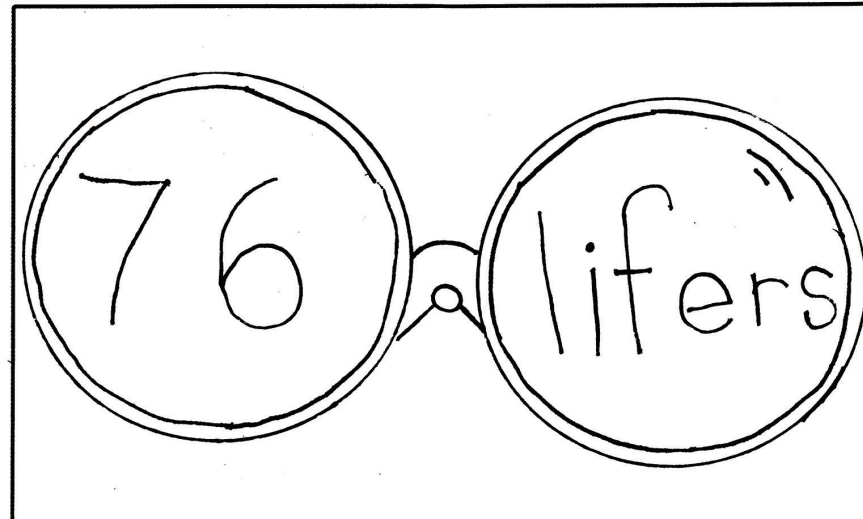
Dr. Garrett Newkirk of Altadena, above, became the first Chairman of the Audubon Society of California, and in 1908, President of what would soon be renamed the Pasadena Audubon Society.



SPARK Bird^{ie} by MYLES Yu



A Few Weeks later...



5/3/26

SPRING BREAK IN HAWAII: The Last Forest of the Palila

by Shuxing (Miles) Wang

Not long after we started our drive on the rough mountain road, our car suddenly jolted and tilted to one side. We got stuck in a trench!

An hour earlier, we had just touched down at Kona airport on the Big Island in Hawai'i. We quickly rented a car and drove to Mauna Kea Forest Reserve to look for the **Palila**, an endemic Hawaiian honeycreeper.

The road in Mauna Kea Forest Reserve is extremely rough and rocky. We were lucky that our four-wheel drive vehicle eventually got us out of the trench and continued along the remaining six-mile dirt road toward R12. With such conditions, it took us nearly an hour to complete.

The small patch of māmane forest between two pū'u (volcanic hills) near the R12 road of Mauna Kea Forest Reserve is now the only place where birders can still reliably find the Palila.

The Palila has evolved for millions of years to consume the toxic seeds and flowers of the māmane bush. The historical range of the Palila once extended all the way to the coast, covering the entire western slope of Mauna Kea. However, following human arrival on the island, the cattle, sheep, and pigs introduced by settlers nearly obliterated all suitable habitat within the birds' distribution area. The lush māmane forest that the Palila exclusively relies on has decreased dramatically.

Furthermore, invasive plants made it difficult for native flora to take root, while mosquitoes transmitted avian malaria to the unprepared Hawaiian honeycreepers. Those human activities wiped out all the Parrot-billed Honeycreepers on the main Hawaiian islands except the Palila. They have become one of the most endangered birds in the world, numbering fewer than 600 individuals. They now survive solely within a patch of forest covering less than 10 square miles on the western flank of Mauna Kea, and face a high probability of extinction within a few decades.

Upon arriving at the R12 intersection of the "main road," we got out of our car to hike our way around the pū'u to the lush māmane forest on the other side.

Suddenly, I heard some faint whistles from the Palila. We slowly approached the forest. As soon as we got close, a Palila swooped down to



Palila (*Loxioides bailleui*) © Shuxing (Miles) Wang



Hugo Wang photo

Shuxing (Miles) Wang in the field on his way to finding these Palilas among the mamane bushes of Mauna Kea Forest Reserve on Hawai'i's Big Island.



Palila (*Loxioides bailleui*) © Shuxing (Miles) Wang

a māmane right in front of us. We then realized that there were two more Palilas in that bush.

We carefully moved closer, and suddenly, a Palila flew over, calling loudly. This triggered the other Palilas to come to the top of the bush. That was truly spectacular! I quickly raised my camera and captured the moment. I was just in time, as they soon followed the fourth bird and flew away into the vast māmane forest further down the road.

With another Palila singing in the distance, we slowly walked back to our car. Such a lovely, yet so endangered bird! It is devastating to know that such a beautiful creature might be gone forever in the near future.

The way back down the mountain was not any easier. Fortunately, we successfully made it to the paved road. The rest of the drive was more or less much smoother. With the relaxing sunset in front of us, we got back to town.

Although we saw a lot of exciting lifers all throughout the trip in Hawai'i, getting the Palila was one of the most memorable moments of the entire spring break.

Building Up Nest Eggs

Birds get busy this breeding season by Carl Matthies

It's easy to miss out on the wonderful splendors of spring if you spend most of your waking hours staring at a screen in a cubicle: To miss the trees going from bare-branched to foliaceous, the sight and smell of flowers in bloom, the sun rising further north and angling higher each day, and of course, to miss the birds migrating and nesting. Thankfully, I quit my cubicle job.

I've written before in these pages about monitoring Western Bluebird nest boxes at Alhambra Golf Course, and I'm happy to report the 2026 season, my fourth, is off to a solid start. As of May 1, 87 eggs had been laid, and 65 chicks had hatched. The bawdy bluebirds are on pace to equal last season's reproductive success, despite one nest box lost to honeybees and another to a golfer's wayward tee shot since last year.

I'm also delighted to share that my nest watching responsibilities have expanded a little, as two once-vacant nest boxes were occupied this spring! As originally reported via PAS social media and e-blast, the nest box I hung in front of the office on Grand Avenue was "rented" by Oak Titmice back in mid-March. The feisty pair, who would chastise me every visit, successfully brooded seven chicks, all of which fledged on or around May 2. There is still time in their breeding season for a second brood, though this is an unusual occurrence for Oak Titmice.

Meanwhile, a Mountain Chickadee pair are busy tending to four little ones in a nest box at Pasadena Highlands, a retirement community with a charming courtyard and even more charming residents. The chickadees were doubtless drawn to the tall conifers that shade the courtyard, as well as to the flower beds and seed feeders maintained by the Pasadena Highlands Garden Club, which is led by my friend and fellow PAS member Gesna

Clarke. It's been truly grand to check on the chickadees with Gesna and her crew.

This year for the first time, I'm documenting all these nest visits with the NestWatch app, which not only shares my observational data with the Cornell Laboratory researchers but, because it's linked to my eBird account, also goes into the California Bird Atlas.



Gesna Clarke and other Garden Club members with the author at Pasadena Highlands

Go to nestwatch.org and californiabirdatlas.org to learn how to stitch these tandem projects together.

I sense a special opportunity in the air this spring. At our March meeting, California Bird Atlas Executive Director Van Pierszalowski said the time was ripe for a state Bird Atlas because of the exponential growth in birding's popularity since the last time a statewide atlas was proposed. We also know North American birds have declined by 30% since 1970, with a lot of cavity-nesting birds bearing the brunt. Nest box deployment, conscientious nest monitoring, and bird habitat restoration are simple, concrete ways to help revive bird populations. So let's get to work.

Please contact PAS Programs Coordinator Carl Matthies at carl@pas@gmail.com with any questions or comments.



One of multiple Western Bluebird nests at Alhambra Golf Course with a clutch of six eggs, near the upper limit for this species. Bits of trash are sometimes incorporated in nests as insulation.



A pile of birds. By the time they are ready to fledge, altricial hatchlings like these Oak Titmice are virtually the same size as their parents. Surely the tight quarters are a strong incentive to leave.



A Mountain Chickadee stays on her nest despite the intrusion. If the female is known to be on the nest, the box is not inspected, but this can be hard to ascertain.

Carl Matthies photos.

GREAT BLUE HERON: Witness at the Water's Edge

by Sepala Weliwitiigoda

Across the bay, a kayak split the mist.
A heron, cloaked in cobalt reverie,
stood still as time upon a granite stone.
One leg tucked tight, the other poised in thought,
its eye fixed on the glassy, dimpled tide.

He waited—not for fish, but for the breath
of something deeper, surfacing at last—
a truth too slow to rise, too sharp to flee.
The river held its secrets just below,
while fog returned to swaddle what we know.

The Great Blue Heron often appears motionless in shallow water—focused, poised between patience and movement. To encounter a heron in this state is to feel the pace of solitude: space to breathe, to meditate, and to ponder thoughts and ideas carried quietly within. For a moment, the world slows, as if attention itself has been invited—or granted.

The life of the Great Blue Heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters retain ecological balance. Because of this reliance, the heron has long been regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are often functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss usually signals deeper disruption long before it becomes obvious elsewhere.

Yet the heron's significance extends beyond biology.

Across many ancient cultures, herons were regarded with reverence long before modern science provided explanations for natural systems. In Indigenous traditions across North America, herons were associated with wisdom, patience, and self-reliance; their presence often signaled abundance and the assurance of sustenance. In ancient Egypt, herons were linked to the soul and the passage between worlds. In Chinese and Japanese art, folklore, and literature, they appeared as emblems of balance, longevity, purity, and the ability to move between elements—water, earth, and air.

These traditions were not grounded in data, but in sustained observation and lived experience with the natural world. Reverence fostered social cohesion and psychological steadiness at a time when nature's uncertainty could not be explained scientifically. The heron's quiet self-reliance served as an example to individuals and families facing sickness, scarcity, and despair—particularly in the production and gathering of food.



Great Blue Heron. © Renée Fabian

Today, science has given us extraordinary insight into how ecosystems function and why species like the Great Blue Heron depend on ecologically sound wetlands. What science cannot compel, however, is care. No legislation or dataset can require people to notice a bird standing at the water's edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it. Laws can protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human behavior—on attention, restraint, understanding interdependence, and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

As wetlands deteriorate through development, pollution, and climate-driven change, herons often respond quietly. Their absence can speak as clearly as their presence. In this way, the Great Blue Heron becomes both witness and messenger, revealing change not through alarm, but through silence.

Perhaps what is needed now is not a return to ancient belief, but a rational reverence—a way of seeing informed by science and experience, guided by respect. Modern knowledge can explain why wetlands matter; reverence gives us reason to care. Together, they offer a framework for stewardship that serves birds, forests, waters, and people alike.

To watch a Great Blue Heron fish is to observe patience as survival. Nothing holds its attention except the present moment. Nothing is rushed. In that quiet discipline lies a lesson. When we learn to notice the heron clearly, we may also begin to notice the health of our wetlands—and our own responsibilities—more honestly. Care, like balance, begins with attention.

pasadena audubon society

board

Luke Tiller	President
Dave Weeshoff	Vice President
Tricia Desmarais	Secretary
Christina Fung	Treasurer
Chris Spurgeon	Programs
Emily Allen	Membership
Ashwin Sivakumar	Advisory Board
Renée Fabian	Wrentit Editor
Alex Coffey	Field Trips Chair
Alicia Di Rado	Publicity Chair
Deborah Tammearu	Member at Large
Irene Farr	Member at Large
Omar Alui	Member at Large

staff

Jared Nigro	Executive Director
Carl Matthies	Programs Coordinator
Alexi Bolton	Garden Educator
Jodhan Fine	Community Engagement Liaison
Helin Jung	Bird Science Program Director

the
wrentit

The Wrentit is published by the Pasadena Audubon Society
75 S Grand Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105

Editor: Renée Fabian | pas.wrentit@gmail.com
Art Director: Patrick Walling
Printer: Marina Graphic Center (310) 970-1777

Messages or queries for Pasadena Audubon
may be left at (626) 410-7506.

PASADENA
AUDUBON
SOCIETY Founded 1904
75 S. Grand Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91105

DATED MATERIAL

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
No. 1880
Pasadena, CA



Drawing by
Guy Coheleach

Printed on 10% recycled paper
FSC Certified

PASADENA
AUDUBON
SOCIETY

Our Mission: To bring the excitement of birds to our community
through birding, education, and the conservation of bird habitats

► thank you to our wonderful donors!

Your generous support keeps our community thriving.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (\$2,000+)

Michele Bogaard, Jennifer DeVoll, Katerina Fragos, GHJ Foundation, Carl Matthies, Susan Matthies, Ann and Karen Mitchell, Mitchell Foundation for Nature, Art, and Science, Pasadena Community Foundation

GREAT HORNED OWL (\$500 - \$999)

Emily L Allen

ACORN WOODPECKER (\$250 - \$499)

Viveca Sapin, Deborah Tammearu

CALIFORNIA THRASHER (\$100 - \$249)

Gesna Clarke, Ruben DiRado, Beth Gertmenian, Lorinda A Soma

WRENTIT (\$5 - \$99)

Mary Allan, Joanne Bartkus, Martin Bern, Ava Bise, Debbie Brunner *In memory of Her Mother*, Christian Camozzi, Hannah Carbone, Lisa Day, Kathryn Degner, David Dowell, Joan Dy *In memory of Moises Cervantes*, George A Eslinger, Shari Faris, Robert Jacobson, Ross Jacobson *In memory of Robert Montgomery*, Catherine Jurca and Scott Fraser, Jared Knickmeyer and Lynda Elkin, Rachel Knight, Ann Kocarek, Laurie Kovalenko, David Labowitz, Sarah Larson, Alice Lewin, Brenda Maceo, Tarrie Mercer, Olga Palo, Julie & Peter Parker, Terry and Roger Proffitt, Susan Reedy, Joyce Robinson, Amit Roy, Laura & Gavin Solomon, Chris Spurgeon, Elaine Tietjen, Cheryl Walling, Patrick Walling, David Weeshoff

DAWN CHORUS (Monthly Donors)

Mary Allan, Martin Bern, Ava Bise, Hannah Carbone, Gesna Clarke, Lisa Day, Kathryn Degner, George A Eslinger, Shari Faris, Catherine Jurca and Scott Fraser, Jared Knickmeyer and Lynda Elkin, Rachel Knight, Ann Kocarek, Alice Lewin, Terry and Roger Proffitt, Susan Reedy, Joyce Robinson, Amit Roy, Laura & Gavin Solomon, Chris Spurgeon, Elaine Tietjen, Cheryl Walling, Patrick Walling, David Weeshoff

BECOME A PART OF THE DAWN CHORUS

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

