

Published by The Los Angeles Audubon Society
www.laadubon.org

March-April 2021 | Volume 87 Number 4

WESTERN TANAGER



Sunset on the Estuary, (San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico) Story on page 7.



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The Western Tanager is the chapter newsletter of the Los Angeles Audubon Society, published online bi-monthly in PDF format, Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec, Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May/June, July/Aug. Articles, letters drawings and photographs concerning conservation, birding, chapter activities, and articles of interest to the membership are welcome for submission. Please send copy as Microsoft Word, RTF documents, or plain text files to editorwtanager@gmail.com. Photos should be high resolution (300ppi).jpg or.tif files. **Submissions are due the 15th of the month to be included in the following issue (Aug. 15, Oct. 15, Dec. 15, Feb. 15, Apr. 15, June 15th.)** All rights reserved. All photographs are used by permission and are copyrighted material of the credited photographers.

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LOS ANGELES AUDUBON MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES

Program March 10, 2021

A Conversation with *Irma Muñoz*

President and founder of Mujeres de la Tierra, *Irma Muñoz* will discuss the new modes of neighborhood engagement necessary in light of changing population demographics in the City and County of Los Angeles.

Program April 14, 2021

We Know How to Stop Bird Collisions With Glass

Presented by: *Christine Sheppard, Ph.D.*, Director Glass Collisions Program, American Bird Conservancy

In the last ten years, studies from a variety of fields have increased our understanding of why collisions occur. The same science has made it possible to create and evaluate an increasing number of products that can make both new and existing structures safe for birds. Because not everyone will adopt bird-friendly design measures unprompted, municipalities around the country and especially in California, are adopting mandatory guidelines.

R.S.V.P. to carolbabeli@laaudubon.org and specify March 10th or April 14th presentation or BOTH.

COMING IN MAY 2020

May 12 – Laiken Jordahl, Center for Biological Diversity discusses the destruction of Trump's border wall.

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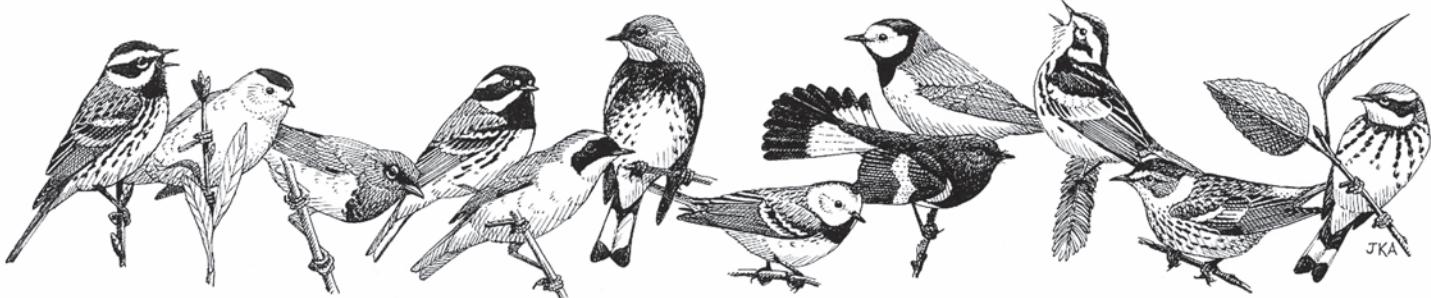
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BIRDS OF THE SEASON — February 2021 | By Jon Fisher

Los Angeles is one of only two counties in the state- indeed in the country- that span the breath of habitats from offshore waters to coastline to mountains to deserts. The other is San Diego County; geographically next door to us. This situation naturally translates to a high diversity of birds, with both counties being closely matched and both having recorded over 520 species. The layperson is unlikely to think of Los Angeles as a great birding destination, but it is certainly that. Every year and every season demonstrate that clearly.

As usual this winter there were plenty of vagrants to chase. The vast majority were continuing birds, but a good number of new finds were also made. An above average number of flycatchers and orioles were present, possibly a result of climate change making the coastal slope even more hospitable for these insectivores and frugivores, or perhaps this year was just an aberration. Time will tell, but the combination of an increasing army of birders finding more and more vagrants and climatological factors leads to the expectation that this trend will continue.

Christmas Bird Counts had all been completed as of January 5, that being the last day within the count period. These produced a handful additional records of vagrants in the process of filling count circles with birders. Though the pandemic forced some changes in the way these counts were conducted this winter, those that took place enjoyed ample success.

Aside from rare birds, there were many great opportunities to look for more expected resident and wintering birds throughout the county. Each season has its own “go to” places, but many of these can be worth visiting at any time of year. Often these locales can benefit from birder coverage in their “off” seasons.

As expected, La Niña conditions continued to offer little precipitation this winter. But whether there is a lot of rain or a little, it does not seem to dampen the discovery of vagrants much. One positive outcome, at least this year, is the fact that recent burn areas vulnerable to mudslides and erosion will have more time to recover.

Here is a look at what notable birds were around the county in January and February.

A “**Eurasian**” **Green-winged Teal**, most likely a returning bird, was back at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera from January 9-23 (Steven Kurniawidjaja).

A male **Barrow’s Goldeneye** was on the California Aqueduct in the Antelope Valley from January 9-February 14 (Lance Benner, Kathi Ellsworth). This species is still very rare in the county, but with reports increasing in the last few years.

A few **Spotted Doves** continue to hang on south of downtown Los Angeles, with two birds in Huntington Park from January 19-February 6 (Richard Barth). Another in North Hollywood on February 5 was less expected (Hans Spieker). The decline of this once common non-native on the coastal slope since the 1980s has been profound.

Up to two **Inca Doves** were in Lake Los Angeles- the town, not an actual body of water- from February 7-13. This spot continues as the only consistently reliable spot for this species in the county. Another small population of up to seven individuals appeared to have gained a foothold south of downtown Los Angeles from 2014-2018.

A **White-winged Dove** at Madrona Marsh in Torrance through January 5 was the only one reported during the period.

Eighteen **Vaux's Swifts** were at Silver Lake Reservoir on January 3 (Ryan Terrill) and from up to five were spotted along the Los Angeles River in Glendale from January 24-February 19 (Andrew Birch).

In Pasadena, a rare **Broad-billed Hummingbird** continued at a residence there through February 15. Vagrant hummingbirds are almost always detected at feeders and are very rarely found "in the wild".

American Oystercatchers were in Malibu on January 2 (Rhys Marsh), with up to two continuing at Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro through February 16 and at the Ballona Creek mouth from January 15-24 (Tom Miko). Another was along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach from February 14-19 (David Moody). Hybrid American x Black Oystercatchers were also seen at these sites, and even those identified as Americans are perhaps not the "purest."

The **Pacific Golden-Plover** along lower Ballona Creek was reported through February 4. Up to sixty **Mountain Plovers** continued in the east Antelope Valley at the A&G Sod Farm through January 13. Up to a dozen were northeast of there at another reliable spot- Avenue I and 110th Street East- from January 25-February 21 (Joseph Dunn).

A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** continued to be seen at Quail Lake through December 30. Reports from the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera, involving at least two individuals, came from January 18-February 19 (Kimball Garrett, Naresh Satyan, Chris Dean). Lastly, one was at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles from January 23-February 12 (Andrew Birch).

Neotropic Cormorants are here to stay and increasing; and not just in the warmer months as one might conclude given the species' name. No fewer than seventeen were recorded over the period, with the caveat that some of these records may represent the same individuals. Nonetheless, the range expansion of this species has been impressive. They were unrecorded in the county until 2016.

The **Pacific Loon** at Quail Lake was seen through January 2.

An **American Bittern** was at the Dominguez Gap Wetlands in Long Beach on January 10 (Joyce Brady) and another continued at the Piute Ponds on Edwards

AFB through February 2. The **Little Blue Heron** at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro was present through February 14. At least one **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** continued in the Ballona area through February 11 and two were at the Alamitos Bay Marina from February 14-19 (Mark & Janet Scheel).

Up to three **California Condors** were seen off and on near Gorman and at Quail Lake from December 30-February 8 (Jon Fisher, Sarah Ngo, Andrew Howe, Mark & Janet Scheel).

The wintering **Broad-winged Hawk** at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates was reported regularly through February 11.

Swainson's Hawks, rare in winter but becoming less so, were in the Antelope Valley on December 29 (Joseph Dunn), at Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City on January 7 (Kevin Lapp), at Hopkins Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach on January 10 (Tom Miko), at Lacy Park on January 18 (Bob Schallman) and over Pasadena on January 28 (Darren Dowell).

A **Zone-tailed Hawk** that has been present in Monrovia for two years was reported through February 8 and a rare in the county "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** remained at the Ballona Wetlands through January 19. The continuing **Rough-legged Hawk** near Gorman was reported through February 6.

Coastal slope **Long-eared Owls** were at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on January 25 (Keith Condon) and in Marshall Canyon in La Verne on January 26 (Michael Morrison). A small number were also reported in the Antelope Valley where they are more expected.

Short-eared Owls were in the east Antelope Valley on January 2 (David & Tammy McQuade) and on February 7 (Chris Dean).

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates through February 15 and another was at Ganesha Park in Pomona on January 7 (Doug Lithgow).

Lowland Williamson's **Sapsuckers** are unusual, thus birds at Almansor Park in Alhambra on January 4 (Kathy Degner) and at Inglewood Park cemetery on January 6 (Larry Schmahl) were of interest.

Also of interest were at least eight **Northern "Yellow-shafted" Flickers** present during the period.

Among numerous expected *columbarius* **Merlins** was one of the pale subspecies *richardsonii* was at Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights on February 7 (Brad Rumble).

The **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** at Heartwell Park in Long Beach was reported through February 13 and **Ash-throated Flycatchers**—similarly rare in winter—continued at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach through February 2 and at Madrona Marsh in Torrance through February 16.

Brown-crested Flycatchers continued at Michigan Park in Whittier through February 9 and at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates through February 15. Though this species breeds regularly not far outside the county, they remain very rare winter visitors for us.

Expected in small numbers as late fall and winter visitors, **Tropical Kingbirds** continued at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park through December 27, at Entraderos Park in Torrance through February 12, at El Dorado Park in Long Beach through January 3 and at Madrona Marsh through January 19. Another was found at Milton Creek Park near Playa Vista on January 13 (Andy Klienheselink).

A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh in Playa Vista from January 14–February 5 (Celeste Jones, Dean Schaff) may well have been the same bird found in late November along the nearby Playa Vista Riparian Corridor.

Moving up on the rarity scale, the **Thick-billed Kingbird** at Horsethief Canyon Park in San Dimas was observed through February 1. This is the eighth winter this bird has spent at this locale. More expected but still rare in winter was a **Western Kingbird** continuing at Madrona Marsh in Torrance through January 19.

The **Greater Pewee** at Rustic Canyon in Pacific Palisades was reported through January 2. Another was at Lacy Park in San Marino from January 8–February 19 (Jack Wickel). The latter bird was apparently first detected on December 19 when it was seen only briefly and tentatively identified as a pewee

of some sort.

A **Hammond's Flycatcher** remained at Carr Park in Glendale through January 2. **Dusky Flycatchers** were at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach from December 9–January 10 (Brad Dawson) and continuing at Stephen Sorenson Park in Lake Los Angeles through January 19. Two dozen **Gray Flycatchers** were recorded this winter, double the recent average for this species.

Pacific-slope Flycatchers continued at Peck Park in Arcadia through January 27, at the South Coast Botanic Gardens in Rolling Hills Estates through February 11 and in Atwater Village through February 9. Another was at Lacy Park in San Marino on February 18 (Holly Coates).

Eastern Phoebes continued in Rolling Hills Estates through February 11 and along the Los Angeles River in Glendale through February 13. A new bird was found at Lake Lindero in Agoura Hills on January 24 (Dan Cooper).

Exceedingly rare in winter was a **Bell's Vireo** that continued at the South Coast Botanic Gardens through January 24. Equally unusual was a **Warbling Vireo** at the Los Feliz Golf Course in Atwater Village on February 10 (Andrew Birch). Much more expected were the five **Cassin's Vireos** present during the period.

Bank Swallows were at Santa Fe Dam on February 13 (Ken Burgdorff) and at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale on February 15 (Keith Condon).

A rare **Siberian American Pipit** of the subspecies *japonicus* continued at the Ferraro Soccer Fields in Glendale through January 31.

A few **Red Crossbills** were detected over the period, with up to eighteen at Pearblossom Park in the Antelope Valley from January 4–31 (Chris Dean, Kimball Garrett) and six at Lacy Park in San Marino on January 11 (Tom Miko). Increased coverage of the San Gabriel Mountains in winter would no doubt add to these records.

Grasshopper Sparrows were at Triunfo Creek Park in Westlake Village through January 2 and at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds from January 6–February 19 (David Bell). **Clay-colored Sparrows** continued to be well represented this winter with over a dozen present on the coastal slope.

A "Red" **Fox Sparrow**, rarest of the four subspecies groups in our area, was on the Palos Verdes Peninsula from January 26-February 13 (Jim Aichele, Cathy Nichols).

At least nine **Dark-eyed "Gray-headed" Juncos** were present this winter, while three **Dark-eyed "Pink-sided" Juncos** were all continuing birds.

About eight **White-throated Sparrows** were reported from late December through February. **Swamp Sparrows** continued at Quail Lake through December 30 and along the Los Angeles River in Glendale through February 19. At least a half dozen Green-tailed Towhees were also present in the county during the period.

Rare in winter were two **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh in Playa Vista from January 15-February 11 (Becky Turley).

Five **Hooded Orioles** were recorded during the period, while a **Baltimore Oriole** continued at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills Estates through February 19. Wintering **Scott's Orioles** included continuing birds in the Antelope Valley at Pearblossom Park through January 30 and in Llano through February 14 and a new bird at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino on January 9 (Marvin Nelson).

A **Rusty Blackbird** first detected on San Clemente Island on December 8 continued through February 4.

Eight **Black-and-white Warblers** were present this winter. A **Lucy's Warbler** was at Bixby Marshland in Carson on December 27 (Tracy Drake).

An above average eight **Nashville Warblers** were present during the period and an **American Redstart** continued at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach through February 19.

Palm Warblers continued at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera continued through February 13, at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood through February 15 and on San Clemente Island through December 29. A nice find was a **Black-throated Green Warbler** discovered in front of the Performing Arts Center in Long Beach on

January 31 and seen through February 14 (Rebecca Barton).

The sharp-looking **Painted Redstart** at Inglewood Park Cemetery in Inglewood continued through February 14.

Over a half dozen **Summer Tanagers** were found in the county during the period.

A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was in Pacific Palisades from February 12-15 (Susan Huniu). Common in spring and summer but rare in winter was a **Black-headed Grosbeak** continuing in Pasadena through February 19. Others were found at Horsethief Canyon Park in San Dimas on February 6 (Jane Stavert, Amy Worell) and in Glendora on February 18.

Perhaps apart from a few gull fanatics and devotees of waterfowl, it is safe to say that almost all birders are anticipating spring migration. Although this technically begins in January, it is passerines that are the headliner for most. These will not appear until March, and not in force until April. Swallows are the one exception and have already arrived in numbers. First of spring sightings are always fun and rewarding and in this time of a changing climate, these records take on added significance.

But spring migration involves much more than Neotropic migrant songbirds. Species that spend the winter locally will also be moving north, though these movements are typically less obvious than the appearance of "new" spring arrivals from the south.

A visit to one of our coastal promontories can be quite rewarding in spring, with Brant, Surf Scoters, Pacific Loons and others streaming north in varying and often impressive numbers. Shorebirds can be found in all the usual places, many sporting their breeding colors. In short, there will be something to satisfy practically any birding interest. 

EXPERTS AND AMATEURS — BALLONA AND BULLDOZERS

By Cindy Hardin, Director of Outdoor Education | Photos by the author



San Blas is a relatively small town (population 10,000) located on the west coast of Mexico in the state of Nayarit. It is surrounded by a large Mangrove estuary that is fed by rivers flowing down from the Sierra Madre Occidental.

This estuary is known worldwide to birders as a birding hotspot. Resident tropical species, like the Roseate Spoonbill and the Wood Stork are present in large numbers. It is also an overwintering spot for many migratory species, including the bird that Los Angeles Audubon Society has chosen as its symbol, the Western Tanager.

I had the good fortune to spend some time in this beautiful spot. In order to best see the estuary, it is essential to hire a small boat to slowly cruise the waterways. My boatman and guide were one in the same, a gentleman named Chencho, who has been a naturalist guide for 45 years.

Chencho knew all the spots to see some amazing species. I saw at least 100 hundred Wood Storks roosting in snags along the water's edge. He pointed out Boat Billed Herons sequestered in the vegetation. During a night cruise he was able to spot owls roosting, and timed our cruise to the exact location where huge amounts of bats swarm through as they commence their night time feeding. Chencho also took care to move slowly and quietly through the waters, never disturbing the abundant wildlife present. It was delightful and inspirational to be in his presence in the midst of so much natural beauty.

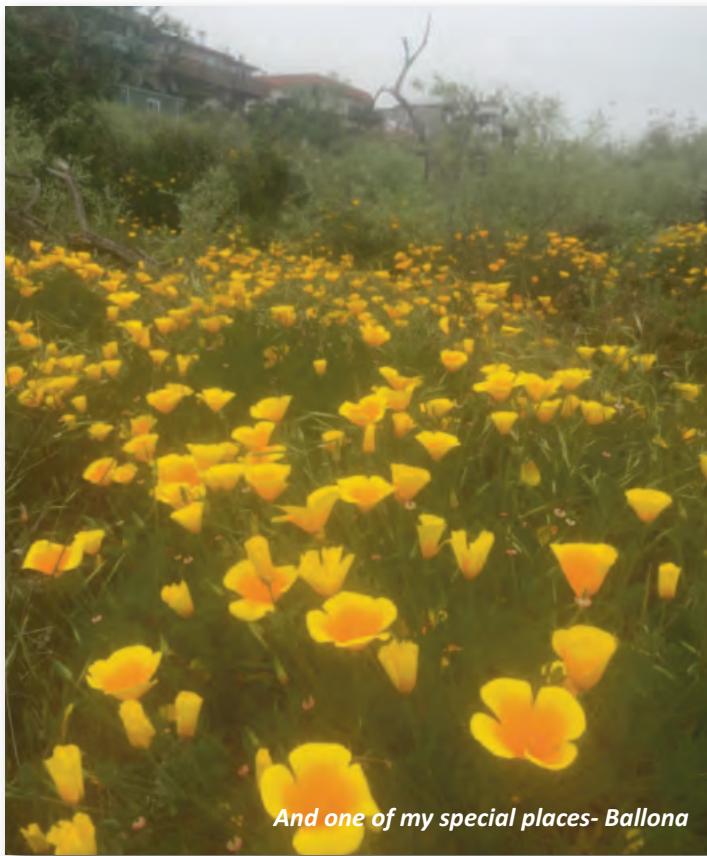
All of Chencho's expertise had been acquired during the decades he has worked as a guide. He had institutional knowledge of the area, and was able to tell me that biodiversity levels had remained pretty constant over the years. This knowledge did not come from the obtaining of an academic degree. His education was from the source: being present at the site for decades on an almost daily basis. Chencho also explained to me that the Mexican government was aware of the importance of this ecosystem, and in fact that it was a protected Ecological Reserve.

Chencho is truly an expert naturalist and conservationist. Sadly, in some circles, his knowledge might not be seriously considered, or worse, simply written off, due to his lack of formal education or a degree. Unfortunately, we have an example of this happening right now in our own backyard in regards to a very precious piece of habitat: the Ballona Wetlands.

At the moment, the State has approved a plan that would disrupt much of the Ballona Wetlands and that is a 'restoration' in name only. A section of habitat, known as Area A, is slated to be bulldozed beyond recognition in a misguided attempt to "re-connect" the wetlands to the open ocean. However, historical records indicate that Ballona Creek only very occasionally reached all the way to the sea, and only during extremely heavy rain years. The plan, known as Alternative One, would create a full tidal habitat that never existed previously on the site.

To make matters worse, there is abundant documentation of a huge number of species that currently use Area A as foraging and roosting spots. Some of these species are threatened or endangered, like the Least Bell's Vireo and the White-Tailed Kite. The vegetation found in Area A, like Arroyo Willow and Mulefat indicate that freshwater is very close to the surface. In fact, during years that see average and above average levels of rainfall, freshwater pools can be found that host fairy shrimp, dragonfly larvae and other water dwelling invertebrates. These seasonal freshwater habitats are a much more accurate reflection of what the wetlands were historically.

Local naturalist experts have extensively documented the presence of these and many more species with photographic evidence over the past two decades. This evidence was included in many public responses and comments during the review period of the Draft Environmental Report for this project. Sadly, although the photos and comments were acknowledged, they were not taken into serious account as the sources were considered "amateurs". These so-called amateurs, like the Mexican guide Chencho, are on-site on an almost daily basis, and like Chencho, have a deep and encompassing knowledge of their local habitat.



And one of my special places- Ballona

Ironically, some of the “experts” cited in the Environmental Impact Report have only visited Ballona a handful of times. The small amount of time actually spent on-site precludes the ability to see the habitat throughout the seasons, and changes that occur at different times of year. For example, if a botanist is only present during the drier months of summer and fall, the wildflowers that bloom in winter and spring will not be seen. An entomologist would certainly miss the Fairy Shrimp in the seasonal ponds if their research only brought them to Ballona during a drought year. Sadly, we are a culture that is obsessed with titles and accreditation, and depth of knowledge that is acquired through non-traditional channels does not at times carry the same weight when viewed by official (i.e. government) agencies.

It remains to be seen if the State’s plans for Ballona will actually come to fruition. At the moment, several lawsuits are active in the hopes that the course for Ballona will be altered. And one can still contact local and state politicians (including the Governor) to express opposition to the Final Environmental Impact Report.

In the meantime, there is something that anyone who cares about nature can do. Become an expert on your own favorite spot! If you are reading this there is a good chance that you already have a nature location that is a particular favorite. It might be one that you visit frequently. Take notice of this area, and

make a point to visit it during different times of year. Document what you see, either with photos (if you have a smart phone, use i-Naturalist) or quick jotting down of notes in a notebook. Try to learn a little bit of its history, and what species were historically present as opposed to what is there now. Share your knowledge with friends and neighbors, and if they seem interested, take them for a visit to “your spot”.

There is power within citizenry, and the advent of citizen science has helped scientist around the world to better document habitats and species present. The Great Backyard Bird Count, an annual event, recently concluded, provides a snapshot of birds in local neighborhoods around the world. This helps to track changes in biodiversity, and to raise awareness of its value. And as always, time spent outside is almost guaranteed to lift the mood and improve the health of the observer.

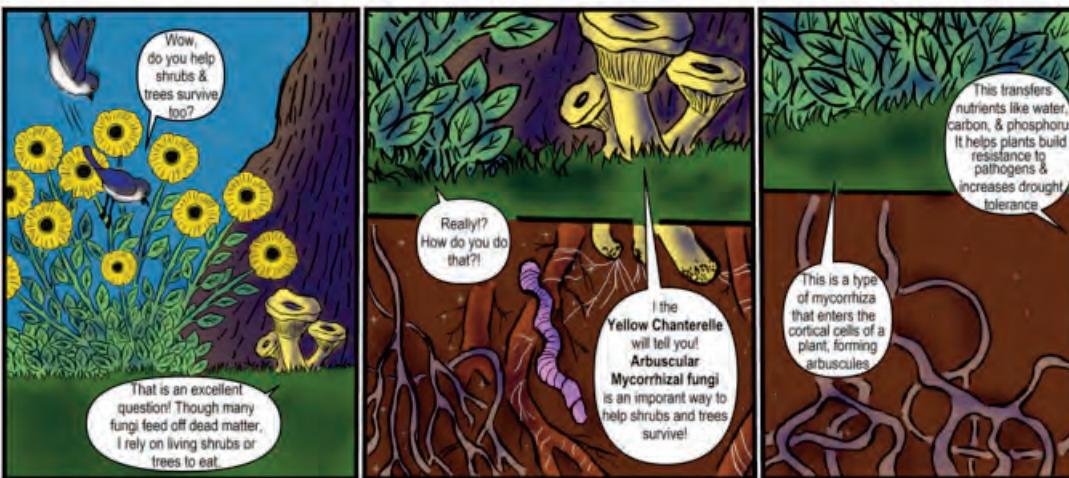
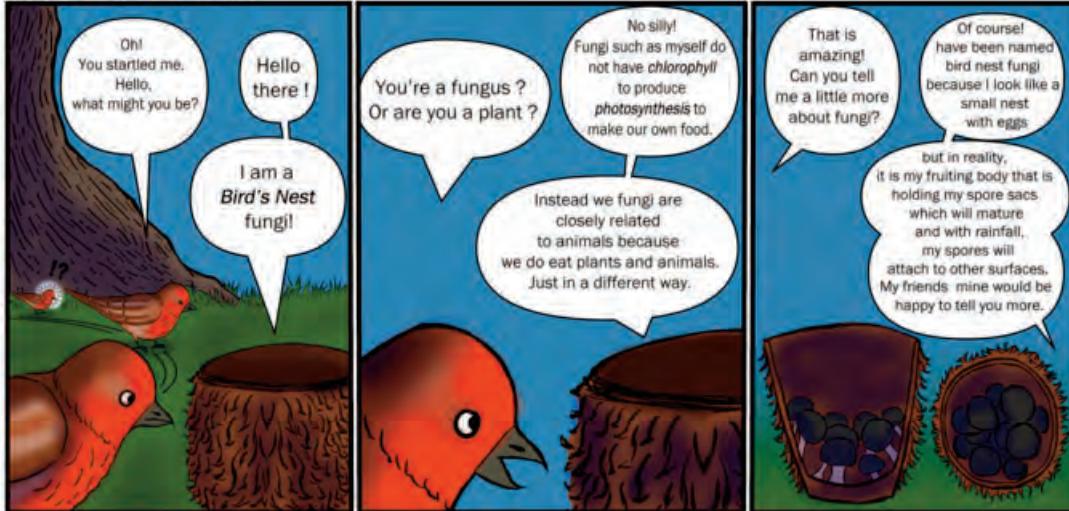
More voices and local knowledge do have the ability to foment positive change. Knowledge gained from on the ground experience is valid, viable and valuable. So be your own expert for the space you love-your information may just one day be of help to preserve it!



FUNGI IN THE CITY

This issue's INTERPRETING NATURE column was a creative collaboration between staff members Brian Young and Arely Mendoza Perez.

Story by Arely Mendoza Perez



Art by Brian Young

INDIAN SUMMER

by Sherry Roberts

One late afternoon I was watering my secluded back yard. In one thick and gnarled tree I heard a faint and compelling “chirp,” a sound from a bird who seemed to be “testing” the grounds. It was more of a question than a chirp.

Since it was an Indian Summer day, I thought the bird might enjoy a tiny shower, so I set the nozzle to “fine” and raised it high into the dense tree foliage.

The water issued forth.

I knew it would be irresistible, and held it high in anticipation of her indulgence. Very shortly I saw a tan and umber head with a face as sweet as the voice from which it emanated. She bent her head this way—that. And soon she emerged onto a bare limb in full view. Oh! It was a Western Fly catcher with a tiny tuft of feathers upon her crown!

The water issued forth.

Mesmerized by the diamonds and rainbows gushing from the hose, she jumped down a limb like a shy young girl on a bathing beach. She bent her head this way—that. And although the yard was aroam with seven cats, she dove, and splashing, dipped and soared into the trail of diamonds and rainbows.

The water issued forth.

Again she partook of the fine, cool mist and twirled and twittered in the air adrift with misty water droplets. I was mesmerized.

And the water issued forth.

By and by she must have had her fill and so retired to a private branch to preen in modesty.

For a few more moments, the water issued forth.

As time passed and she did not return, I moved to lower the hose. Suddenly I realized my bedroom window was open, into which, over these long moments...the water issued forth. 



Photo: David Larson/Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

AN UNEXPECTED GIFT

by Michael H. Lester

A black phoebe has taken a liking to our backyard, perching variously on the spent orchid stem, the tomato plant cage, the long slender stem of the Agapanthus, and the telephone wire. She visits often throughout the day, feeding on the small yellow moths she spies in the grass, swooping down to snatch them and gliding back up to her perch to swallow them.

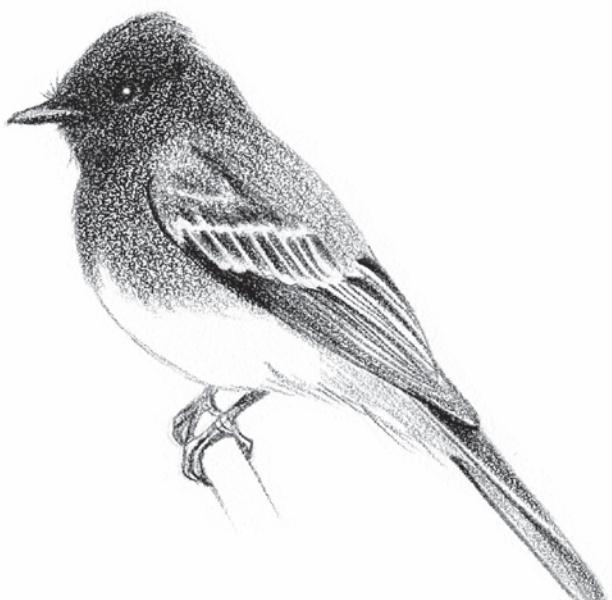
as I slice
the grapefruit into quarters
I keep one eye
on the paring knife
one eye on the black phoebe

She deposits her delicate white droppings on the tomatoes, the patio, and on the grass without the slightest sign of embarrassment or remorse. For my part, I consider her presence a gift and her droppings a little surprise package delivered right to my door at no cost to me.

a special
on fresh fertilizer
I trust
the delivery person
to find the right spot

Our dog, Newman, a cute mongrel weighing about 18 pounds, has gone blind. He can't see the black phoebe and pays it no attention, instead spending the day lying on the driveway soaking up the comforting heat of the afternoon sun. Sometime this afternoon, looking for a spot to deposit his own droppings, Newman must have been sniffing around the black phoebe's perch, because stuck to his furry belly was a feather from the black phoebe!

I admire
a treasure from the wing
of the black phoebe
a black-tipped scrivener's quill
to dip in my inkwell



WILD PARROTS APLENTY IN PASADENA

by Wanda Teays | Photos by the Author

Up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, no it IS a bird! 50 of them!

One of the many joys of living in Pasadena is getting to see a flock of Amazon parrots making their way across the city. In the morning they venture south from Washington, Walnut, and Holly, and onward. Many then hang out near the Urth café on Madison, south of Colorado. Others come to rest in the palm trees and sycamores near the City Hall. On a recent morning around 9:00 a.m. dozens of parrots were in the palm tree behind Alexander's and the Pizza Kitchen on Los Robles and Colorado. They also frequent trees on Euclid and Union before heading back north.

Mind you, they are not worried in the slightest about predators or Pasadena residents who value peace and quiet. Not these avians! They clearly enjoy loud and frequent squawks as they make their way across the sky. What a celebration!

Fortunately for us bird lovers, we can count up to 50 parrots flying north as sunset nears. Around 5:00 p.m. they come up from Madison toward Los Robles and on to Euclid and Garfield, squawking their way over the Plaza Las Fuentes—much to the delight of small children and the rest of us.

How did so many come to reside in Pasadena? Escapees from a few households and then the product of a breeding frenzy? Travelers from Mexico who came to stay? Survivors of a pet shop fire fifty years ago? Whatever the reason that we've been graced with their presence, these wonderful parrots are as much a part of the splendors of Pasadena as the Rose Parade. Aren't we lucky? 

Bird lover Wanda Teays (wteays@msmu.edu) is a Philosophy & Ethics professor and author who lives with her husband in Pasadena. She snapped these photos of parrots that stopped to play as they made their way toward the City Hall.



ADVENTURES IN NATURE WHEREVER WE ARE

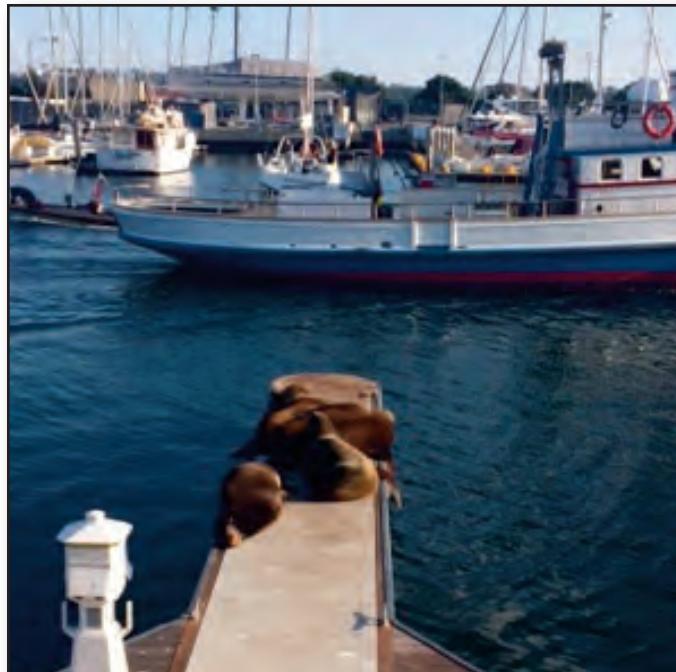
by Judith Deutsch | Photos by the Author

Sometimes our most memorable experiences with the animal kingdom occur when we least expect them, both in and out of nature's settings. On a humpback whale-watching cruise in Juneau, Alaska, I watched from our deck an amazing rescue at sea. A mother whale became entangled with a buoy and could not dive. Her young calf remained close by her side, clearly distressed and spooked. A rescue helicopter arrived within the hour and dropped divers into the water, where they were visible to the mother humpback. She calmed immediately and held still for over an hour while the divers cut her loose and the baby nestled. As mother and calf turned seaward, mom dove and breached, signaling her thanks. The rescue divers were amazing, and the rescue helicopter kept on station as boats arrived. Rescue attempts are not always successful, and Golden Eagles were circling the calf, but we had a happy ending that day.

My first close encounter with a whale was at SeaWorld in San Diego, California, currently home to many orphaned and injured ocean inhabitants. I took the back scene tour that raised funds for animal rescue and welfare including "Lunch with Shamu," one of several generations of Shamu-named orcas. Seated at a table alongside Shamu, I bit into my peanut butter sandwich only to have Shamu leave the water and slide down our eight-person table to my sandwich. Whales have huge, muscular tongues they use to lick food off of their baleen, much as we lick peanut butter off of the roofs of our mouths. From the response of the trainer, this was an unplanned snack.

At home, I spend a lot of time in and on the water of Marina del Rey near Santa Monica, California. Frisky sea lions, Mallards, and Brown Pelicans bask on piers and boat sterns. On occasion they keep pace with our kayak. Cloudy days we walk a path along the Ballona Wetlands with its Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Allen's Hummingbirds, Mourning Doves, squirrels, and other wildlife.

Wherever we tend to be, there are wonderful adventures to be found in and around nature. 



WHY DO BIRDS CHOOSE TO LIVE IN THE CITY OF THE ANGELS?

by Tiffany Larsen

From the perspective of a bird, I'd have to say that Los Angeles must look like a huge, unlivable, freeway-riddled, car-congested nightmare. If I were a bird I think I might choose a nearby, countryside idyll. I can just imagine my avian alter ego choosing a setting with rolling hills, fresh streams, fruited orchards and small farms.

So, that is why, on a daily basis, I'm simply astonished at the number and variation of birds that I see flying around my neighborhood. I often think, "I'm obliged to live in a big city, because that is where my job is, but a bird has a choice, so what is going on here?"

It's crystal clear (please excuse the pun) that the environmental protection laws that started in the mid-80s must have something to do with this. I lived in L.A. during the 70s & 80s, and I remember smoggy, smelly, shimmering brown skies that looked like a post-apocalyptic hell-scape. I actually remember not worrying about letting my cat out in the backyard, because there were never any birds around to worry about. Luckily all of this changed in the mid-80s. There is an article from the LA Times, dated March 4, 1985, announcing that leaded gasoline would be banned as of January 1986. Such a brilliant decision for the skies, the birds, and, oh yeah, the humans. Today, the skies in Los Angeles are usually blue and clean enough so that you can actually see the tops of tall buildings. Fancy that.

Without Googling it, the different species (that I can name) of birds I see on a daily basis include: crows, egrets, geese, hawks, hummingbirds, parrots, pigeons and seagulls. There are also several different types of little brown birds that I cannot name, but they flit around merrily and sing the most delightful tunes. There is a little black bird with a bright yellow chest that has been hanging around my front yard lately. My neighbor reports that we have some owls living in a nearby palm tree. My landlady once noticed a healthy, well-fed (to the point of being rubenesque) homing/racing pigeon taking refuge in her backyard for about a week. She could see the colorful band on his leg and wondered if he had lost his way, or was just taking a break from his daily-grind. She named him Plumpy.



Here is a list by the Audubon California that names the top ten birds to be found in L.A., and I'm sure there are many more. <https://ca.audubon.org/news/top-10-birds-california>

Perhaps the grid-like patterns of backyards with tall hedges and an abundance of bushes and trees is appealing to these intrepid, winged city-dwellers. As long as there is not a cat in residence these neighborhoods might be an ideal place to call home. For those humans that do have a cat, there are measures you can take to minimize the threat to the birds, as I explain in my story linked below:

<https://www.laaudubon.org/blog/2021/2/4/bird-protective-reflective-garden>. Note: Since I wrote the above, I have also found that there is a bib that you can attach to the cat's collar that can impede the cat's ability to pounce. Just Google "cat bib" to find it.

Yet, still I ponder why birds would choose city-life over country-life. Perhaps they enjoy the upbeat vibe of the Los Angeles citizenry. Could it be because there is so much positivity emanating from the "woke", cool, and hip people around this town? Maybe they enjoy the variety of music streaming from the houses and car windows? Do they relate to that *je-ne-sais-quoi* of cosmopolitan sophisticates? Do they think that because they are beautiful, winged creatures, who sing like divine beings, that they are indeed the angels for which this city is named? Are they drawn to the twinkling lights of tinseltown? Perhaps they are hoping to be discovered and become the next big Hollywood animal star? Move over Lassie.....here comes Plumpy!

Whatever the reason, the happy fact that birds are once again flocking back (yes, I did it, another groan-worthy pun) to live in Los Angeles, is a very promising indication that this city is once again a city that can even support human life. I'll never take clean skies for granted, and I hope that younger folks really do appreciate the difference that the EPA has made to our skies, our animal inhabitants, and our human population. Thank you environmental law-makers circa 1985! The birds thank you, and I thank you for returning our glorious town back into a city worthy of its name!

Tiffany Larsen is an animal lover, quixotic dreamer, and clandestine opera singer. She has worked as an Executive Assistant, Copywriter, and Editor in California, Florida and Paris, France. She has a B.A. in Psychology from UC Irvine. Email: VerseauTiff27@gmail.com



THE BIRDER IN ME

by Rebeca Ladrón de Guevara | Photos by the Author

We were at the Alamo River Wetlands counting birds. The other birders and I walked armed with our binoculars and scopes with no room to think about anything but the birds and the storm that was fast-approaching. As we heard different birds' songs or spotted their plumage, we called them out and put the bird into focus in our lenses: Western Meadowlark, Sandhill Crane, Inca Dove, Abert's Towhee, Brewer's Sparrow.

There are so many things to remember about a bird. A species' song variation, their different colors. Their beaks, eyes. Silhouettes. The way their wings look mid-flight at a distance, or up close. A Blue Heron and I caught each other by surprise, I froze. He took flight. And there are all those names, and those places where you saw a bird for the first time: A lifer.

So many things to remember about a bird, and so many to forget about you, elusive lover. The way you feel to the touch when you are here. Your lips on mine. The way our laughs get muffled against each other's chests when you hold me under your wings. How we can communicate without talking. We've tried to stay away from each other so many times only to return, year after year, like dutiful birds, to the same spot to breed. Out of instinct more than habit.

I tried to forget you, but the birder in me couldn't any more than I could a Mockingbird's mating serenade in the middle of a sleepless night, or the when and where I've seen my rarest find: A Cinnamon Teal resting in Salton Sea before continuing on its Pacific Flyway path.

In your constant absence, the birder in me, learned to love you like I love migrating

birds. One of the other birders radioed in, "Team of Snow Geese on your right."

I stopped, looked skyward in awe as I watched the geese pass me by, taken aback by my unconditional love for something so fleeting and uninterested in me. 



"OLD DOUBLE SCRATCH"

by Rachelle Arslan | Photo by the Author

Patiently he watches me as I fill the bird feeder. As the other birds keep a safe distance, he hops after me, following me as I move across the patio. Plain and brown, the California towhee isn't the most colorful bird in the backyard but what he lacks in flashiness, he more than makes up for in personality. Bolder than many of the other birds, he often flies toward me when I step outside, especially if the feeder is empty. He follows me or waits on a nearby chair. He isn't picky about where he eats either, just as happy on the ground as he is sitting on the feeder. Sometimes he digs in the grass or among the leaves using both feet to turn the substrate; a technique which earned him the nickname "Old Double Scratch."





Ralph W. Schreiber 2021 Ornithology Research Awards

Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Awards for 2021 — Call for Applications

The Los Angeles Audubon Society presents an annual research grant, the Ralph W. Schreiber Ornithology Research Award, to support research relevant to the biology of birds. Award recipients are limited to students and amateur ornithologists who are not able to secure research funding through channels available to professional ornithologists, and who reside in southern California (from San Luis Obispo, Kern and San Bernardino Counties south) or are currently enrolled in a southern California academic institution. There is no geographical restriction on the research area. While a more favorable consideration of research that is of a local nature involving local species and conservation issues, all researchers are encouraged to apply. Only one award will be given for an individual project or thesis.

One or more awards will be given out in 2021, with the maximum amount of an award to be \$1500. The application deadline for the 2021 Research Award is April 30, 2021, and it is anticipated that grants will be awarded in June 2021. In the last few years, grants were awarded for projects ranging from studies of urban parrots in Los Angeles to Emperor penguins in Antarctica.

Interested applicants can obtain further information regarding this award, and application materials, by downloading the materials from the Society's website: (laaudubon.org), or by contacting me at: iluvs@ucla.edu.

Thank you in advance for your help, and I look forward to receiving applications from your students.

Sincerely,

Ryan J. Harrigan
Grants Committee Chairman
Los Angeles Audubon Society