

# the wrenitit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 72 · NO. 5 | JUNE-AUGUST 2024



Costa's Hummingbird © Tom Mills

president's perch 

## ESCAPE TO THE MOUNTAINS Luke Tiller

I've always cherished birding in the lofty heights of the San Gabriels. Maybe it's because I grew up in England, where the highest peak reaches a mere 3,209 feet, and then spent ten years in similarly flat Connecticut. Therefore, it was exciting news to read that 100,000-plus acres are being added to the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, including areas closest to Pasadena (more on page 11).

I hope this expansion, which will embrace our beloved Bear Divide, comes with real financial allocation to manage the dumping and trash issues plaguing some areas. Recently I've been reflecting on how embarrassing it is taking visitors to many parts of Los Angeles, as so many of our wild places are now despoiled by garbage.

If you can get beyond the trash, there's still so much to enjoy up in the surrounding mountains from beautiful birds to other specialized flora and fauna. During the week, it is generally so empty of human life that it's almost impossible to imagine you are just a stone's throw from the heart of a throbbing metropolis. Many of us find the serenity we need up there.

As Joni Mitchell sang, "Don't it always seem to go. That you don't know what you've got. Till

it's gone." As much as I love the San Gabriels, I think I only realized how much I needed them following the road closures that have impacted our access to many favorite birding spots. Thankfully it seems there is a roundabout route back to spots such as Chilao and Charlton Flats via Upper Big Tujunga Canyon Road.

### My mountain birding highlights

Any of the pullouts in the first few miles on the Upper Big Tujunga Canyon Road are great for birding, as you travel south from the Angeles Forest Highway to the Angeles Crest Highway. You can expect **Bell's Sparrow** of the nominate subspecies (*belli*), **Black-chinned Sparrow**, **Costa's Hummingbird**, and with some luck **Mountain Quail**.

Another favorite spot is Chilao, where you get to see **Steller's Jay** parkour from tree to tree on their way to the feeding station (bring your own bird seed and water if you visit outside the weekend).

My third favorite spot is the Blue Ridge area just above Wrightwood. Heading out to Blue Ridge Campground takes you through stunning vistas and offers an incredible diversity of birds

including the highest of elevational breeders like **Clark's Nutcracker**, **Williamson's Sapsucker**, and **Townsend's Solitaire**.

There is so much to enjoy up there in the San Gabriels. Recently I spent a magical evening along Upper Big Tujunga Road listening to the sounds of a frog and toad chorus while watching a **Common Poorwill** hunting moths. Get out there and discover!



Black-chinned Sparrow © Luke Tiller

## Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

▶ JUNE 11 7:00-8:30pm (No meetings in July and August)  
 Contact [pasadenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pasadenaudubon@gmail.com) if you would like the Zoom link to attend.

## Monthly Chapter Meetings

▶ JUNE 19  
**The Birds That Audubon Missed with Kenn Kaufman**  
 7:00-8:30pm, Online (Zoom link at: [pasadenaudubon.org/meetings](https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings))  
 In the early 1800s, John James Audubon was only one of several naturalists racing to discover the birds of North America. It was an exciting and at times acrimonious scientific competition that surprisingly few bird fans know about. Renowned birder Kenn Kaufman joins us to tell the story. It's the subject of his new book, "The Birds That Audubon Missed." Since the 1980s, he has been an editor and consultant on birds for the National Audubon Society, and he's been a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society since 2013.  
 (No Monthly Meetings in July and August)

## Annual Banquet and Trivia Slideshow

▶ JUNE 29  
 6:30-8:30pm, Eaton Canyon Nature Center  
 Spend a summer evening with us at this family-friendly event and enjoy a delicious banquet with vegan and gluten-free options. We will have a heartwarming recognition of our dedicated volunteers with the PAS Heroes Awards and our fan-favorite bird photo slideshow with a twist - trivia! Everyone is welcome to share one or two photos for the game when you sign up for the event. Tickets are \$40 per person and \$25 per child.  
 More info: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/spec>

## PAS Officer Elections

▶ JUNE 30  
 11:00am, Online (Contact [pasadenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pasadenaudubon@gmail.com) to get the link)  
 Pasadena Audubon Society will be hosting Officer Elections for the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The position of Secretary will be open, As Mayra Sánchez Barba will be stepping down at the end of June. There are currently no nominees for these positions. Please email Jared Nigro at [jaredn.pas@gmail.com](mailto:jaredn.pas@gmail.com) if you would like to make a nomination. Current Officers are President Luke Tiller; Vice President Dave Weeshoff; Secretary Mayra Sánchez Barba, and Treasurer Gary Breaux.

## Free Bird Walks

Check dates, places, and make reservations at:



Red-whiskered Bulbuls during a PAS bird walk at the Arboretum.

[www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips](https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips)  
 We organize half a dozen free bird walks and field trips every month in Pasadena and beyond. All ages and birding levels are welcome. PAS members also enjoy free monthly bird walks at The Huntington and Los Angeles County Arboretum.

This quarter of the year spans the reversal of bird migration: the tardiest northbound songbird migrants pass through in early June, then by late July we're already looking

for southbound shorebirds. In addition to looking for those, we will be scheduling trips up to the San Gabriel Mountains and walks to appreciate some of our most local and valued habitats, such as Millard Canyon and Hahamongna Watershed Park.

## Summer Movie Night

▶ JULY 19  
**Audubon Center at Debs Park evening**  
 (check for updates at [www.pasadenaudubon.org/spec](http://www.pasadenaudubon.org/spec))  
 From the acclaimed documentary "Winged Migration" to the family-friendly Hollywood film "The Big Year," PAS has showcased a diverse selection of bird-themed movies for our summertime movie nights. What's on the lineup this year? Stay tuned to find out! Everyone is welcome to join us for this movie night. Bring your picnic, friends, and family for a delightful evening this summer!

## Social

▶ JUNE 26, JULY 24, AND AUGUST 28  
**Birds & Beers** 5:00-8:00pm, Wild Parrot Brewing Co.  
 2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena  
 Wild Parrot donates \$1 per pint to PAS! Drink up!

## Interested in Volunteering with PAS?

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



Birders at Hahamongna in March.

Fernanda Ezabella photo.

## chapter news

## Lending Library

Check out more than 300 bird-related books at our lending library. You will find field guides for both international (Mexico, Australia, Canada) and U.S. destinations (Texas, the Carolinas, Arizona). Among our non-fiction books are *The Big Year*, *The Wild Duck Chase*, and *Wesley the Owl*, a favorite of our Programs Coordinator, Jamie Cho. You can also purchase PAS merch during your visit (have you seen our award-winning *Birding Guide*?)

Open to the public on the 1st Friday of each month, 1:00-5:00 p.m., at the PAS Office (75 S Grand Ave, Pasadena, 91105).

**No walk-ins.**  
 Please email [pasadenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pasadenaudubon@gmail.com) to schedule your visit.

\*Please note, we are currently unable to accept book donations, but feel free to swap your bird-related books with ours.







# MY BIRDING EXPERIENCE AT HAHAMONGNA PARK

Oliver Huang, 11-year-old

Last March, I went to the Hahamongna Watershed Park in a bird walk with PAS Field Trip leader Darren Dowell and some other members. We met at the main parking lot around 7:30 am and soon started heading south towards Berkshire Creek.

After about ten minutes, we had already seen two **Purple Finches**, some **Mourning Doves**, a **Northern Flicker**, and other common birds. We now had a grove of oaks with **Bushtits**, **kinglets**, and **warblers** to our right. There was also some brush to our left marked "Least Bell's Vireo Habitat" with **White-crowned Sparrows**, **California Towhees**, and **Scrub-jays**, but no vireos.

As we paused momentarily to examine a songbird flock, I spotted a bird with a red head and black body in a bush. I immediately identified it as a sapsucker and remembered seeing it in a book, but I could not recall the exact species. I pointed it out to Darren, and he said it was a **Red-breasted Sapsucker**. It was a lifer for me!

We continued to work our way south when someone shouted "Black-and-white Warbler!" Forty heads swiveled in one direction, hoping to see the rarity. Since nobody else saw it, we decided the bridge spanning Berkshire Creek

would be better for us. We saw two **Black Phoebes**, two **Song Sparrows** (one carrying food, so we suspected there was a nest), countless **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, and some **Bushtits**. No rarities.

Heading to the reservoir, I remembered there was a Killdeer nest on the pathway. I told Darren about it, and we decided not to go down too far. At the water, we saw **Canada Geese**, **Ruddy Ducks**, **Ring-necked Ducks**, **Rough-winged Swallows**, and **Buffleheads**. Just when we were walking, a **Killdeer** flew in front of us and landed on the well-hidden nest.

On the way back to the parking lot, Darren

showed us a Bushtit nest with a tiny, cute Bushtit in it. The nest looked like a giant brown peanut stuck in a tree, but it was amazing.

In the end, Darren offered a trip back to Berkshire Creek to look for the rarities we had missed. I joined with a few other people, and we spotted a **Western Bluebird** (for some reason we had not seen earlier) and a beautiful adult male **Wilson's Warbler** coming down for a drink. We did not see rare birds, but it was still a great trip. Hahamongna is one of my favorite places to bird because of the many species. I am looking forward to going there again.



Oliver Huang photographed a California Towhee at Hahamongna Watershed Park in March.



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



## Volunteer Highlight: Jerry Ewing

**PAS Volunteer since 2016**  
**Position** Docent at the Bird Science Program  
**Favorite bird** Blue-gray gnatcatcher  
**Favorite Pasadena park** Tournament Park at Caltech

I started volunteering with the Pasadena Audubon Society in 2016, first doing cleanups at Peck Road Water Conservation Park and then in the native plant garden at the Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School. Showing kindergarteners how to plant a little plant was fun. When I was a landscape contractor, I showed many workers how to do it, but never a 5-year-old.

Then, I heard about the Docent Training for those interested in getting involved with the Bird Science Program. Not having had my own children, this sounded like a stretch for me. But, being retired, I knew I needed to get out of the proverbial "comfort zone" and try a new challenge. The class was an education in itself. It included several classes in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center and trips outside for bird and plant ID.

When the training concluded, we had the chance to sign up for events at local Pasadena elementary schools. We would go to the school and see how other experienced birders presented various topics such as migration and adaptations. The following week, we would meet those students for a field trip. We also had experts bringing raptors to show the kids.

Last week, I led two groups of six fourth-graders at Debs Park. It was a brand new experience for me as I've usually deferred to someone more experienced to be the leader. It was fun. You don't have to be an expert. You can make an ID mistake and then correct it. Everyone is there to enjoy, learn together, and form lasting memories. I even had us go in an unintentional circle, seeing things we'd already seen. No big deal. Heck, we might have seen different birds the second time around.

Another great feature of volunteering is meeting other volunteers who share common interests: plants, being outdoors, birds, and talking about birding.



# Arcadia High School Senior Pioneers Native Plant Gardening on Campus

Jared Nigro, PAS Executive Director

It is easy for me to feel an overwhelming sense of despair when reading about Earth's current environmental state. However, Arcadia High School senior Michelle So recently reminded me that every inch of land is an opportunity for hope and change.

Earlier this year, 18-year-old So assembled a team of local green thumbs with a simple, yet powerful mission: to turn her campus into a native plant beacon, starting with one small plot of land. Pasadena Audubon Society was fortunate to be included on this list. We also helped by offering direction with choosing the garden site and developing a plant list with Palo Verde, Common Yarrow, Narrow-leaf Milkweed, California Goldenrod, White Sage, and much more.

I caught up with So to learn more about her inspiration and vision for Arcadia High School's first native plant garden.

**PAS: You only have a few months left in your high school career. What inspired you to take on this project months before graduating?**

So: I wasn't an official member of PAS, but my friend Yuerong Xiao brought me to a volunteer meeting one day, and they were talking about ways to get involved in conservation. One program was maintaining the garden at Washington Elementary STEM Magnate School, and I thought this was so cool that PAS created a space where people and students could come together and appreciate this bird habitat space.

Around the time I started this project. I sent an email to our Principal, Dr. Angela Dillman, saying "here's the reason why we should save

the birds on our campus." She's not an expert on birds, so she looped in Dr. Jorge Muñoz, Assistant Principal. I then presented a little slideshow on why it's a good idea and where we can get funding. I said, "PAS will back me and give me advice." Then they were sold.

**PAS: Starting a native garden requires more than a few helping hands. How did you convince your fellow classmates to roll up their sleeves?**

So: One of the requirements for passing the AP Environmental Science is doing three hours of service learning projects such as helping out with Amigos de Los Rios or Heal the Bay. "Garden removal" was one of the activities they could do that month. Fourteen people showed up, and we removed everything out of the garden.

**PAS: How was that experience?**

So: It was really exciting. I was overwhelmed thinking about what had to be accomplished, but we had two students who knew their way around huge gardening tools and everyone

followed suit. Everything was removed after an hour. We spent the last 20 minutes shaping a little ditch so the water has somewhere to go when it drips in. It was really cool to see students learn how to save an ecosystem and save the birds.

**PAS: What are your hopes for the native garden at your soon-to-be alma mater?**

So: Hopefully, in five years everything will still be alive in the garden. I'm hoping that everything will settle in and look really nice. The plan is that this small garden will act as a model or sample for the rest of the campus. Right now, we have a lot of non-native oaks and plants. If this garden is a success, the school plans on filling all of its green space with California native plants and water-wise landscaping.

This fall Michelle So will attend Yale University to study Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (one major). She is excited to meet new people, try new things, and go birding in Connecticut.



From left to right: Dr. Jorge Muñoz (Arcadia Assistant Principal), Flora Ito (Theodore Payne employee), Michelle So and her colleagues Eve Liu, Jasmine Su, and Elly Lu, shopping native plants at Theodore Payne Foundation Nursery



# Rain or Shine, PAS' Native Garden Tour Blooms Again

Evellyn Rosas, PAS Garden Educator

Once again, the Pasadena Audubon Society (PAS) was invited to share with many native plant enthusiasts the flourishing garden we have been growing in partnership with Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School since 2019.

Last April, for the second time in a row, we were thankful to be part of the Theodore Payne Foundation's annual Native Plant Garden Tour, a popular self-guided event across 41 private homes and institutions in Greater Los Angeles.

Like other tour hosts, I was awaiting clear, sunny skies to showcase the spring blooms, only to realize that the rain could affect the tour. However, the consistent downpour didn't stop around 200 people from appreciating the lush landscape and catching sight of local birds.

With the support of PAS members Dave Weeshoff, Gesna Clark, Jamie Cho, and TPF docents Lisa Turallo and Nico Anderson, curious guests gained more interest in our conservation efforts both on and off campus.

Guests shared their excitement for planting natives in their yards, hoping the plants could look like ours. Some people mentioned how discouraged they felt when they started their home garden, and I know the feeling!

Last summer, students and I added eight Narrow-leaf Milkweed plants and, unfortunately, half of them didn't survive the heat and gophers dug up the roots with their burrows. But we felt hopeful when we noticed new ones growing outside of their initial planting site. It's all about trial and error.

For the tour guests looking for help, I recommended TPF's resources from which I learned the most, such as classes and workshops for beginners, plant guides, and books about native planting.

I'm also grateful when I can learn from volunteers who share their gardening background. A tour-goer and past volunteer shared a story about when all the schools shut down because of Covid-19 and she was

at Washington Elementary focused on pulling out weeds all over the garden. She had a full-circle moment on the tour as she witnessed how much it has evolved since then with the clarkias and poppies taking over the space.

The garden was created four and a half years ago, when Washington's STEM Lab teacher Jodie West collaborated with PAS and other community organizations for hands-on lessons of Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

As garden ambassadors, each grade is involved in planting and weeding while learning about how plants grow, what wildlife lives in our garden, and our role in conservation. Students love to notice House Sparrows, Scrub-jays, California Towhees, Lesser Goldfinches, and hummingbirds. If we're lucky, now and then we'll see a Red-tailed Hawk perching nearby.

I feel proud that the public can see how our garden can serve as a representation of a habitat. Hopefully, other schools are inspired to create native gardens on their campus as well.

Evellyn Rosas, who has been PAS Garden Educator since 2022, patrols the California poppies, *Iris douglasiana* 'canyon snow', California hedge nettle, and California buckwheat at Washington Elementary. She will be looking for volunteers this summer to help gather for a seed library.



Jamie Cho photo.



## BIRDATHON 2024 WRAP-UP

Darren Dowell, PAS Birdathon Organizer

Pasadena Audubon Society's 2024 edition of Birdathon will likely be remembered for a single bird. But it also featured anticipation, effort, a whole lot of birds, surprises, and generosity. The event was held April 27-28, during favorable weather at the annual peak of spring migration in the area... but where were the migrants?

The atypically low presence of warblers in the San Gabriel Valley meant the teams struggled to tally species in that part of the checklist. Still, we were able to enjoy active birds through the day and that lasting hope that we'd find a Black-throated Gray Warbler before the end. (We didn't.)

### ► The Arroyo Ramblers

**Team Captain:** Carl Matthies

**Members:** Jeff Hale, Darren Dowell, Wolfgang Matthies, Steph Fisher, and Leeann Hale

**Species:** 89

**Time:** 5:00AM to 7:00PM

**Distance:** 15 zig-zagging miles along the Arroyo Seco, covering from Gould Mesa Campground to the La Loma bridge

Led for its second year by Carl Matthies, the team put in the longest day and walking distance. As some reward for the effort, they found the most species—89. The highlights came before sunrise, as they were welcomed by two calling Swainson's Thrushes among the first few songbirds of the day, then picked out, at a distance of over half a mile, a fly-by Neotropic Cormorant (the little one, flying with nine Double-crested). The species count was up to 76 as they left Hahamongna at 9 AM, but then new "day birds" became hard to find.

Matthies couldn't hide his frustration at once again falling short of the team's 100 species goal: "I was frankly dismayed by some of the birds today. We were out here raising money for their benefit, and the Western Screech Owls stayed mute? The Steller's Jays picked today of all days to be shy and retiring? Not cool." I don't think we've seen the last of the Ramblers, and tweaks to the route are already under discussion for a future spring.



Arroyo Ramblers team members striving for the first House Sparrow of the day, a little after 10 AM. Photo by Carl Matthies

### ► The Altadena Canyon Wrens

**Team Captain:** Emily Allen

**Members:** Ria Cousineau, Oliver and his father Guoping Huang

**Species:** 41

**Time:** 7:00AM to 2:30PM

**Places:** Eaton Canyon, Altadena Crest Trail, Rubio Canyon, Las Flores Canyon

Allen's team had the most up and down day—literally—as they hiked the local trails through the foothills and tallied 41 species, one above the team goal. They started at the Eaton Canyon and counted a couple of Rufous-crowned Sparrows, several Yellow Warblers, some White-throated Swifts, and a Canyon Wren seen by Ria Cousineau but only heard by the rest of the team.

Then they moved on to explore Altadena Crest Trail. Gooseberry Canyon is one of the larger cuts into the mountains along that trail, which was busy with Lesser Goldfinches. "As we left the trail, Oliver Huang sighted both a Hooded Oriole and a Western Tanager just below the entrance in some residential shrubbery," said Allen.

At Rubio Canyon, a little-known but sweet canyon with lots of running water, things started to pick up with Huang's sightings of both a Western Flycatcher and a Hammond's Flycatcher. Again, Canyon Wrens were heard but not seen. The last stop was Las Flores Canyon, parallel to Rubio. "Much of it is residential, and unfortunately a large crew of weed whackers was busy drowning out the bird songs," said Allen.



Western Tanager, drawing photographic attention by Altadena Canyon Wrens team member Guoping Huang.

### ► Pasadena Parks Posse

**Team Captain:** Deb Tammearu

**Members:** Jieyu Zheng and her mother Susan, Loretta Selinger, Leslie Sobal, Joan Dy, Catherine Hamilton, and Lara Michael

**Species:** 70

**Time:** 13 hours

**Places:** Viña Vieja Park, Peck Road Park, Eaton Canyon

Eight birders armed with binoculars formed the Pasadena Parks Posse, sheriffed by Deb Tammearu. The team counted birds over a 13-hour period, but at high noon was found enjoying lunch, and then rest.

They started at 7 AM in Viña Vieja Park and progressed to Gwinn and Eaton Sunnyslope Parks, conveniently located all in one cluster. After that, the team went to Peck Road Water Conservation Park, where it was time for an early lunch and a substantial break. Viña Vieja was a great place for the "usual suspects," while Peck was the best for warblers and waterbirds.

Early evening, Tammearu and Catherine Hamilton went back out to Eaton Canyon. "We had hoped to make that part of our morning walk, but it was simply too crowded to deal with," said Tammearu. "Going out later allowed us to add what I'll call 'dusky' birds to our list: Western Screech and Great Horned Owls."



Some members of the Pasadena Parks Posse: Jieyu Zheng and her mother Susan, Loretta Selinger, Leslie Sobal, Deb Tammearu, and Joan Dy. Photo by Catherine Hamilton

The Pasadena Parks Posse saw 12 species not seen by the Ramblers or Wrens (including three grebe species, Forster's Tern, and Least Bell's Vireo), bringing the collective total for the San Gabriel Valley teams over 100.

### ► Team Bushwhack Birder

**Team Captain:** Joel Moser

**Species:** 29

**Distance:** 3.3 miles

The last team to form, but no less appreciated, Bushwhack Birder was captained and staffed by Joel Moser. He birded along a stream in the Castaic area, bushwhacking both sides of the creek on available trails and thru moderate to heavy brush and overgrowth.

Apart from birds, he gave a full garment report. "I had knee-high wading boots with pants tucked in them, secured with two lapped layers of wide gorilla tape," he said. "It provided an overall waterproofed height of 4" above the knee. It worked perfectly during the many back-and-forth crossings."

Moser got a close look at: Black-headed Grosbeaks, male and female Hooded Orioles feeding on yellow honeysuckle, Rock Wren, Western Flycatcher, Lazuli Bunting, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Western Wood-pewee, numerous frogs, turtle, and a set of bear tracks. Not so close but equally amazing: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Cooper's Hawk in flight with a snake, White-throated Swift, Bullock's Orioles, Costa's Hummingbird, and Western Kingbirds.

"I also had a very close encounter with an obviously well fed, 4-5' rattlesnake who was not exactly happy about me taking closeup pictures," he said. More highlights were three waterfalls and a hummingbird with nesting tufts zipping onto 1/3 built nest.



A Rock Wren from Bushwhack Birder Joel Moser near Castaic Lake.

### ► The Annibirdaversathon Team

**Team Captain:** Laura Solomon

**Members:** Ashok and Meera Boghani, Betty Cole, Jane Glicksman, Mike Davis, and Mary Freeman

**Species:** 23

**Time:** 8:00AM to 12:00PM

**Place:** gardens of private home in Pasadena

Saving that memorable bird for last... One team made perhaps the rarest discovery ever in PAS Birdathon history.

They started the day enjoying a lovely, relaxed morning in the garden of Laura and Gavin Solomon in Pasadena with breakfast treats, tea, and coffee. They spied the usual suspects, but kept waiting in vain for any warblers.

Finally, just before 11 AM, they thought they saw an Orange-crowned Warbler on the ground with the House Finches and towhees. "But we noticed the field marks were wrong: the bill was too big, the bird wasn't shaped right, it was calmly on the ground, and it was far too green," said Solomon.

"A quick check in Sibley showed that we were looking at a female Painted Bunting!"

Ashok Boghani was able to take pictures and send them to experts to confirm. "What a way to end our morning! We may have only seen 23 species, a far cry from our record, but we were happy with what we saw!"



The refreshments offered by the Annibirdaversathon Team were exceeded only by the appearance of a female Painted Bunting. Photos by Laura Solomon and Ashok Boghani

While the birders came away with memories, and some measure of glory, all of the proceeds go to support the many programs of PAS. Thank you to our dedicated teams and our generous supporters!

[birdathon@pasadenaaudubon.org](mailto:birdathon@pasadenaaudubon.org)

► The **Painted Bunting** is a migratory species that breeds in the south-central and southeastern U.S. This Pasadena bird was a vagrant, veering over 500 miles off the usual migration route, and selecting a yard (featuring native plants, we should add) for a refueling stop. It is the male that is "painted," and the female has a subtle yet distinguishable appearance worth learning about in hopes of picking out one of these very rare birds in California on some future occasion.

## Birdathon in Numbers

**Fundraised** \$3,698.27  
**Biggest Fundraiser** Altadena Canyon Wrens

**26**  
Birders

**33**  
Pledges



## COUNT BIRDS, HELP SCIENCE: Project Phoenix Needs You



Dave Weeshoff, PAS Vice President

Pasadena Audubon Society is encouraging all our members to participate in an important research project by counting and reporting the number of birds seen or heard, by species, for 10 minutes each week in a location convenient to them.

Eventually, this information will support our efforts to maintain or improve the abundance of birds in our area by clarifying the impacts of wildfires due to anthropogenic climate change.

Project Phoenix is a community science project supported by the UCLA La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC).

The goal is to engage communities in monitoring birds in their neighborhoods during summer and fall to learn more about how wildfire smoke and urban air pollution impact bird behavior and species distributions. This research will help identify the places and resources birds use when it is smoky to inform local conservation strategies and protect birds in the age of megafires.

The program is open to birders of all ages and backgrounds, including families and beginner birders. There is no cost to participate, and online training is available for folks new to birding.

Volunteers sign up to conduct weekly, 10-minute, stationary point counts of birds at a monitoring site of their choosing—their backyard, favorite park, etc. They may contribute additional observations (e.g., from additional surveys or opportunistically) if they choose.

Last year's Project Phoenix focused on monitoring birds in California for three months—August through October. In 2024, it is expanding to



include communities in Washington and Oregon and collecting data for five months—July through November.

Identification of species by sound may be determined using “The Cornell Lab Merlin” app on your smartphone. Reporting of the data is via eBird.

### PROJECT PHOENIX RESEARCH GOALS:

- Collect data on the presence and abundance of birds during the fire season.
- Evaluate the impact of urban air pollution and wildfire smoke on bird distributions, and consider if these responses vary across habitats.
- Propose local intervention strategies to help birds during acute smoke events.

Signups begin June 1.

To participate, go to <https://tinyurl.com/projectphoenixsignup>

## San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Gains Over 100,000 Acres

Exciting news for birds and birding in our area! On May 2, 2024, President Biden signed a proclamation to expand the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. The proclamation adds 105,919 acres of U.S. Forest Service lands to the south and west of the current monument's 346,177 acres; protects additional cultural, scientific, and historic objects; and expands access to outdoor recreation on our shared public lands for generations to come.

We commend the President on using the Antiquities Act to preserve sensitive ecosystems and critical natural habitats for wildlife, bring more resources and funding to the management of the area, and increase the number of natural areas accessible for everyone's enjoyment.

Also, the intense level of use of the area, especially on peak days, creates management challenges that include excess trash, inadequate bathroom capacity, overflow parking that impairs emergency access, and adverse impacts

on fragile water ecosystems. The U.S. Forest Service, in collaboration with dozens of partners, is addressing these challenges to support safe, fun, and accessible visitor experiences and protect fragile and unique resources.

### Join PAS Conservation and Outreach teams

As usual, we invite you to join our Conservation and Outreach teams to identify and address the larger issues that require collective action and advocacy, including expanding our influence to all communities in our San Gabriel Valley area. To do so, please contact Dave Weeshoff at (818) 618-1652 or [weeshoff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:weeshoff@sbcglobal.net)





## NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW More Than Meets the Eye

Carl Matthies

Summer is the season of swallows across much of the U.S. and Canada, and this issue we're spotlighting a species eBird calls the "plainest swallow in North America." I suppose that's a fair description up to a point. Swallows do forage in mixed flocks, so it's a handy mnemonic for field identification. The Northern Rough-winged Swallow's coloration is also undeniably drab compared to the iridescent aquamarine of a Tree Swallow or the bold markings of a Cliff Swallow, but rest assured these birds are not the least bit dull.

On the contrary, Northern Rough-winged Swallows are named for the tiny serrations on the ends of their primary feathers, which are longer and more hook-shaped in males. It's a sufficiently unusual trait that the bird's Latin name makes redundant reference: *Stelgidopteryx* ("scraper wing") *serripennis* ("saw feather"). While it has been hypothesized that the barbs create an alluring sound during courtship flights, for any budding ornithologists out there wondering if they can make a great discovery, *no one knows* what function these barbed feathers serve!

Aside from the microscopic differences in flight feathers, Northern Rough-winged Swallows are not sexually dimorphic. However, juveniles can be distinguished from adults by the presence of wing bars that are a lighter shade of brown. Although Northern Rough-winged Swallows feed like other swallows, by catching airborne insects on the wing, they are slightly larger, and glide with straighter wing posture and fly with deeper wing beats than Bank Swallows, the species most similar in appearance. They are also said to forage lower over the water and deeper into cover than other members of the swallow family.

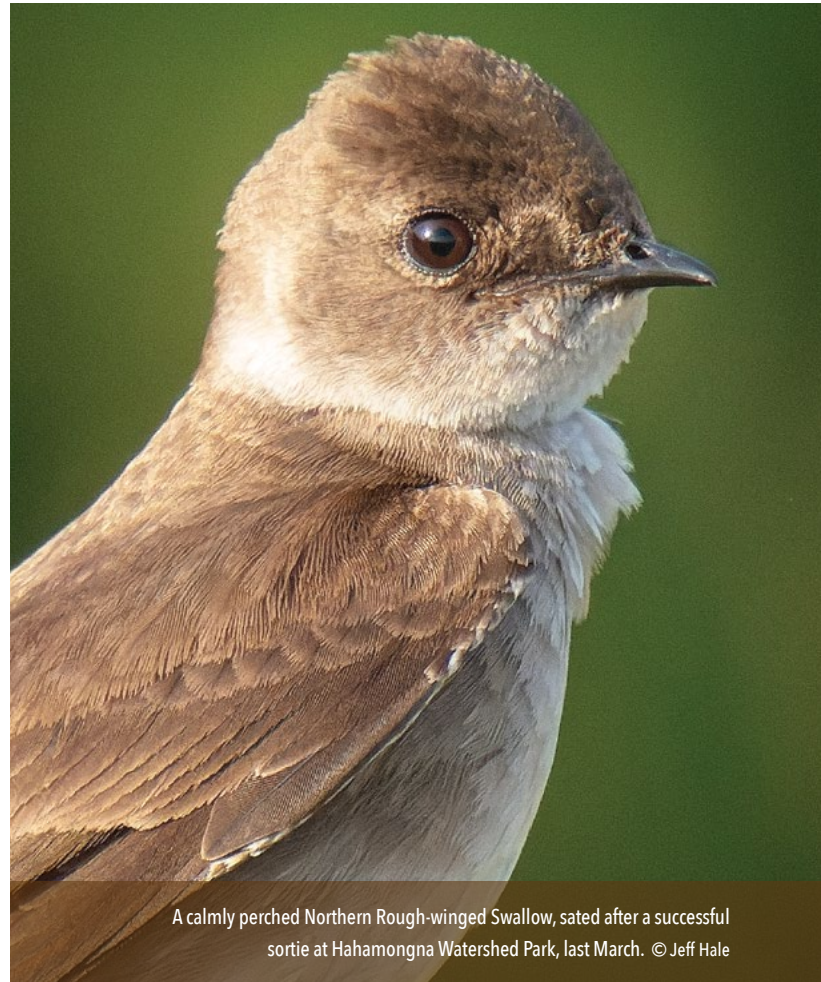
Northern Rough-winged Swallows make squelchy little calls in flight. The sound is reminiscent of the Snowspeeder lasers from the Battle of Hoth scene in "Star Wars: Episode V," an analogy surely everyone can relate to! Their song is a soft gurgling fripp seldom heard outside of nesting season.

Swallows are renowned for nesting in dense colonies, but Northern Rough-winged Swallows prefer to do it alone or in small groups. Females construct nests of assorted plant materials, occasionally incorporating cow dung, in shoreline burrows created by other animals or in the crevices and cavities of manmade structures. Pairs have just one brood per year of up to eight white eggs that hatch after about two and a half weeks of incubation. Males assist in feeding and defending the territory.

### A Southern cousin and conservation status

Typically, though not always, when a bird has the word "Northern" in its name, it has a Southern counterpart, and likewise for Western and Eastern. This holds true for Northern Rough-winged Swallows, yet it was not always so. Prior to 1983, they were classified as one species, comprised of numerous races, with a breeding range from Southern Canada to Argentina.

The Rough-winged Swallow was split by the American Ornithologists' Union after research published by F. Gary Stiles demonstrated sympatric speciation in Costa Rica, where Northern Rough-winged Swallows



A calmly perched Northern Rough-winged Swallow, sated after a successful sortie at Hahamongna Watershed Park, last March. © Jeff Hale



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generally prefer the mountains and Southern Rough-winged Swallows mostly stick to the lowlands. They can be phenotypically distinguished as well. In fact, there are subspecies of both Northern and Southern that never leave the tropics.

Northern Rough-winged Swallows are currently categorized as a species of low concern by conservation agencies. Unfortunately, in this day and age, that does not mean they are thriving. According to Partners in Flight, populations have declined by nearly 20 percent since 1970. Possible reasons include pesticides and climate change, both of which may adversely affect the availability of insects.

We shouldn't take any of our wonderful avifauna for granted, so the next time you're out scanning a "gulp" (one of several collective nouns for swallows), be sure to savor the sight of the unassuming Northern Rough-winged Swallow. They're just plain extraordinary.

## BEYOND WATERCOLORS: The Inspiring World of Catherine Hamilton

Mary Angel

One afternoon at Arlington Garden, I stumbled upon an event called “Urban Birds.” In the midst of musicians and artists, I found myself at the Pasadena Audubon Society’s outreach table looking at the “Birding Guide to the Greater Pasadena Area.” Having attended art college many years ago, I was awed by the transparency of the watercolors of the birds on the cover and throughout the book.

That day, my adventures with the Pasadena Audubon began. I chatted with the women at the table and purchased the birding guide. I later learned the watercolor artist, Catherine Hamilton, would be teaching a series of classes called “Field Sketching Fridays” and signed up immediately.

At the beginning of the series, Hamilton sent out a detailed list of supplies. The Monday before each class, she told us the location and suggested materials, with the option to just bring a pencil and sketchbook. Each class began with a demo of the techniques and materials we would use that day (monochromatic colors, graphite or watercolors, toned paper or plain, etc.).

During the intro to a watercolor class to capture the landscapes around us, she asked if we could see the blue and purple colors in the mountains – and at first, I couldn’t. But the more I observed, the more I began to see the depth and variety of colors in the mountains.

After each session, we spread our sketchbooks out on the ground or a table (affectionately called the “throw-down”). By sharing our work, we saw how the same landscape can be interpreted differently by each person. There is no judgment—we were all very supportive of one another.

The heart of these classes is Hamilton herself. She’s immensely gifted at what she does and genuinely loves to share it. She gets a sparkle in her eyes when we nerd out over her various supplies and tools.

Hamilton started drawing at the age of one, was observing birds by the time she was five, and had her own pair of mini binoculars by the age of seven. Her father, a birder, took her on birding walks and encouraged her to keep an ornithological notebook and a field notebook.

She wanted to draw birds but quickly learned they don’t sit still, so she copied from field guides.



Artist Catherine Hamilton (right) and students inspecting a “throw-down” of the class’ field sketchings.

Soon she was taking photographs of birds with her little Brownie camera, then with her mother’s Canon FTb, and was developing her own film by seventh grade. She always knew she was going to be an artist. When she attended art school, she fell in love with painting.

Years later, while living in New York, she frequently went birding in Central Park. She appeared in a documentary called “Birders: The Central Park Effect” (2012) and later attended a Zeiss workshop in the park. Through a series of connections, they asked her to be in a product video and, eventually, she became their U.S. Ambassador. This inspired her to drive across the country, visiting wildlife refuges, studying sparrows, and drawing birds.

Hamilton is a keynote speaker at birding festivals, teaches workshops, leads tours, and has traveled the world on Zeiss-sponsored expeditions. Most notably, they went to Nagaland, India, to witness thousands of Amur Falcons migrating through the Himalayan foothills. She was the first Western woman to visit the hosting village.

When asked what inspired her to offer field sketching classes at PAS, Hamilton said, “I teach in that arena as part of my Ambassador travels with Zeiss, but it’s never really over a period where I get to meet people and develop relationships. Since I’ve been back in the Pasadena area, and decided I’m going to stay based here as long as I can, I wanted to see if there is a community that might be interested in doing it with me. So, I’m grooming people! ‘Come with me – let’s go draw!’”

Since the field classes are open to people on all levels of experience, Hamilton also taught a detailed sit-down class called “Tips and Techniques.” “It makes for a bit of chaotic teaching at times, because you’re dealing with people who have never unwrapped a pan or squeezed a tube of watercolors, all the way up to people who already had a career and maybe used them in graphic design. But it makes it fun and more interesting for me.”

Join Catherine Hamilton on a field sketching tour in Peru in October

<https://tinyurl.com/CatherineHamilton> and follow her on Facebook and Instagram (@birdspot).

“Field Sketching Fridays” will resume in the fall.



# A Summer Full of Birds by Korean American Artists

Meher McArthur

Anyone driving down Los Robles Avenue in Pasadena towards Colorado Blvd will be struck by the spectacular mural of giant flying birds on the north face of USC Pacific Asia Museum. Created earlier in 2024 by Korean American artist Dave Young Kim, this monumental painting honors the many immigrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands who now call Southern California home, symbolized here by a flock of 38 migrating birds flying westwards—each representing a different API nation.

Kim spent weeks designing “A Momentous Moment in Time of Passage and Landing,” planning and painting the image onto the wall, aided by an electric scissors lift. The diversity and detail of the birds are breathtaking: from the flamboyant peacock (India) to the serene Red-crowned Crane (China) and the cheeky Black-and-white Magpie, which represents Korea, from where Kim’s family migrated in the early 1970s. The artist matched birds to nations as best as he could when there was no official “National Bird.”

Though not all birds migrate, the message is still powerful – the arduous flight that many birds make each year in search of sustenance and a safe place to nest mirrors the journey many humans also make, as Kim explains, “towards betterment and belonging.”

Over the summer, bird lovers can enjoy more of Kim’s and other artists’ artworks featuring birds in an exhibition I curated for the Sturt Haaga Gallery at Descanso Gardens. “Hwajodo: Flowers and Birds in Korean American Art” will present traditional Korean “flower-and-bird painting,” or *hwajodo*, alongside the work of four contemporary artists of Korean heritage, showing how natural themes such as birds and flowers endure and continue to hold symbolic meaning in today’s art.

In Korea, traditional folk paintings, or *minhwa*, often pair birds and flowers to create auspicious imagery that was made to be displayed on special occasions. For example, a pair of ducks symbolize marital harmony, and lotus flowers symbolize fertility because of their many seeds, so pairing these motifs creates a visual wish for a happy marriage blessed with children. The paintings featured, mostly works by Professor Kee Soon Sung and her *minhwa*



Photo courtesy of Dave Young Kim.



USC Asia Pacific Museum’s new mural by Dave Young Kim features 38 different bird species.

painting class students, also feature cranes, symbols of long life, magpies, meaning good luck and good news, and the mythical phoenix, an emblem of goodness and morality.

The remainder of the exhibition showcases the works of four contemporary artists from the Los Angeles area who draw from their Korean heritage to varying degrees. Dave Young Kim and Dana Weiser fully embrace the artistic vocabulary of traditional Korean art—including magpies, cranes, and ducks—but also expand it by adding local California birds—Barn Swallows, hummingbirds, and hawks.

Weiser, a Korean adoptee who grew up in a Caucasian American family, draws from Korean

ceramics and textiles that tell her own personal narrative. In “Anna’s Hummingbird,” she has intricately embroidered a pair of hummingbirds with a vase of peonies, flowers associated in Korea with high status and female beauty. Although these tiny birds are not native to Korea or represented in Korean imagery, Weiser uses these birds from her California life to connect with her Korean artistic roots.

Veteran artists Hei Myung Hyun and Jane Park Wells both left Korea in the 1960s and embraced minimalism and other non-figural artistic styles in the U.S., so their compositions are largely abstract. However, in a recent painting, “Hope #2,” Wells depicts a flock of elegant white cranes gliding through the air. Though rendered in a contemporary style and format, the traditional symbolism of these birds as creatures of longevity, resilience, and hope endures in this work.

The birds are harder to spot in Hyun’s geometric and stylized landscapes, but they are also inhabited by our avian friends, including ducks swimming together on tranquil ponds and even an egret or two. It is worth standing very still and looking deeply at these peaceful landscapes—but this shouldn’t be too challenging for PAS members!



Anna’s Hummingbird (detail) by Dana Weiser, an example of Korean hwajodo.

**Hwajodo: Flowers and Birds in Korean American Art**  
June 28 to September 29; 10am–4pm daily;  
Sturt Haaga Gallery at Descanso Gardens;  
More information: <https://tinyurl.com/artshowdescanso>

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