

# the wren tit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 73 · NO. 1 | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2024



Clay-colored Sparrow © Luke Tiller

president's perch 

## FALL MIGRATION MYSTERIES Luke Tiller

Fall migration is probably my favorite time of the birding year. Where spring offers stunning birds in breeding attire, fall offers riddles in the shape of birds in immature or basic winter plumage. These young and basic plumaged birds are all the better for challenging one's birding skills. Fall also promises more rarities, often young birds that have taken a wrong turn somewhere on migration or have slightly incorrectly wired brains that have set them off on the wrong course. One of the things I love about going out into nature and birding is you just never know what you are going to see, and during fall migration that feels like it is never more true.

The scientific study of bird migration is almost as fascinating to me as how the birds undertake these incredible journeys themselves. Just google Stephen Emlen's studies of migratory orientation in the Indigo Bunting to enter a world of wonder. I also highly recommend last year's talk by Rebecca Heisman on the Pasadena Audubon Society's YouTube page about her book "Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration."

Of course, migration is a time fraught with dangers for these migrating birds with both

natural and manmade trials encountered. You may have seen the news reports of a GPS-tagged Swallow-tailed Kite that had almost made it across the Gulf of Mexico when it ran into Hurricane Debby and was forced to divert 12 hours back to land in northern Florida.

A significant known issue for birds on migration is collision with buildings and windows. Initially estimated at killing as many as 600 million birds a year, newly released research suggests that this may be a significant undercount given the number of birds that don't die immediately and bumping up losses to as high as perhaps one billion birds a year. The better we understand the challenges these birds face the better we can hopefully reduce needless losses.

### **Bird Early and Bird Often**

Over the next few months, your approach to birding should be to bird early and to bird often (to misquote Al Capone). The best places to find migrant birds are often those places where you find lush grass, watered plantings and open water in the concrete jungle that is Los Angeles. Locally this means hotspots like Peck Road Water Conservation Park, Hahamongna and Santa

Fe Dam. At this time of year, birds can be found almost anywhere and I would highly encourage finding your own little local park patch and documenting what bird activity you discover there in eBird. One of my favorite activities on the east coast is an event known as The Big Sit, where you literally wait for the migrant birds to come to you, and I'm hoping this fall I might have the time to finally undertake one here out west.

We've had some turnover of our board recently and I want to acknowledge the wonderful work of outgoing board members Carl Matthies, Mayra Sanchez and Sok Tng. Carl was a longtime editor of *The Wren Tit* (and is deputizing in this edition in some capacity for our new editor who is currently covering the Olympics!), Sok did an incredible job of professionalizing the development and fundraising capacities of the organization, and Mayra translated our *Birding Guide* into Spanish and stuck with us as secretary through a job change and a move away from Pasadena. I'm grateful to them for their time and commitment to PAS and to those members who have volunteered to step up onto the board in the last couple of months. We will have introductions to the new board in the next issue.

## Monthly Chapter Meetings

► WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

### Mickey and Jon's Bird ID Quiz

7:00-8:30pm, Eaton Canyon Nature Center and via Zoom  
(Zoom link at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings>)

Continuing a fall tradition (about year 22!), Mickey Long and Jon Fisher will present the September Pasadena Audubon program on Bird Identification. They will display photos of mystery birds and closely related, look-alike birds for challenging discussion. Using field marks, seasonal occurrence, geographical distribution, habitat preferences, behavior and other criteria, Jon and Mickey will pass along tips for bird identification. Their goal is to mix it up with identifications that inform beginning birders to seasoned field ornithologists.

► WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

### Guest Speaker (TBD)

Check our monthly meetings page for the latest info!  
<https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings>

## Bird Science Program Docent Training

► THURSDAYS ON SEPT. 5, 12, 19 & 26

9:00am-12:30pm, Eaton Canyon Nature Center

We are seeking enthusiastic volunteers to help guide students during classes and field trips for the Bird Science Program (read about it on pages 6 and 7). No prior



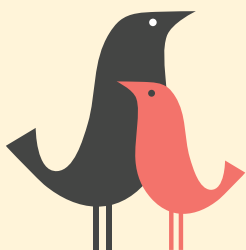
experience is needed! This training will prepare you to support the program along with our director and assistant directors. If you enjoy working with children, being outdoors, and learning about birds, this opportunity is for you.  
Signup at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/bscience>

## Coastal Cleanup at Lower Arroyo Seco

► SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

9:00am-12:00pm; Check-in location: Brookside Park,  
360 N Arroyo Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91103

Every September, Pasadena Audubon hosts a cleanup in the Lower Arroyo Seco area as part of Heal the Bay's Coastal Cleanup Day event. This event allows you to participate for as long as you can within the timeframe. Last year, over 200 community volunteers collected 250 lbs of trash! Join us to make a difference again this year. Signup required at: <https://healthebay.org/coastalcleanupday/>



## Intro to Birding Class

### Classes

► MONDAYS ON OCTOBER 14, 21 & 28

6:00-8:00pm, Burbank REI, 1900 Empire Ave., Burbank, CA 91504

### Field Trips

► SATURDAYS ON OCTOBER 19 & NOVEMBER 2

Within the Greater Pasadena area

Instructors: Jon Fisher and Mickey Long

If you're fascinated by birds but don't know where to start, or if you're a beginner looking to learn more, this course is for you. With expert guidance from Mickey and Jon, you'll get tips and insights on all things birding, including where to watch birds, what equipment you'll need, identifying local species, and exploring birding hotspots. Price: TBA Signup at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/classes>

## Botany for Birders Class

### Classes

► THURSDAYS ON NOVEMBER 14 & 21

6:00-8:00pm, PAS Headquarters, 75 Grand Ave., Pasadena, CA 91105

### Field Trip

► SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23

8:00-11:00am, within the Greater Pasadena area

Instructor: Mickey Long

Discover the joy of birdwatching by learning about the plants that make up their habitats. Covering key plants in Southern California's diverse landscapes, the classes will help you identify important trees and shrubs, understand which plants provide food for different birds, and discover where to spot specific species based on vegetation.

Price: TBA Signup at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/classes>



California Scrub Jay on Sugar Bush © Fernanda Ezabella.

## Social

► WEDNESDAYS, SEPTEMBER 25 & OCTOBER 23

**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!



## Free Bird Walks

Check dates, places, and make reservations at:

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

## Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► SEPTEMBER 10 & OCTOBER 8 7:00-8:30pm

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

## PAS RECEIVES LARGEST DONATION IN ITS HISTORY FROM MARY SUSAN KYROPOULOS

Jared Nigro

In 1904, when the Pasadena Audubon Society was founded, a donation of over \$1 million would have been unimaginable. Today, 120 years later, it is still unimaginable. And yet, it happened.

Earlier this summer, PAS received initial funds of over \$1 million from the Mary S. Kyropoulos Bequest. While the final dollar amount depends on many items such as fees, there is much hope that PAS could ultimately receive over \$2 million.

Mary Susan Kyropoulos (February 25, 1934–July 21, 2023) was a South Pasadena resident, teacher, and librarian. “Susie,” as friends and family called her, also played the viola in the Pasadena Community Orchestra.

She graduated from South Pasadena High School in 1951 and earned a teaching certificate from the Claremont Graduate School on a Ford Foundation Scholarship. She is a Stanford alumna who spent a year working in San Francisco before returning to her hometown where she spent the rest of her life.

She taught at elementary schools in the San Gabriel Valley for almost 20 years before receiving a degree in Library Science from the University of California, Los Angeles. Kyropoulos spent the remainder of her career as a librarian at a private school.

### Mary and PAS

Kyropoulos became a member of PAS in December of 2017. She was a great fan of our educational efforts, including the Bird Science Program (more on pages 6 and 7) and this very newsletter, *The Wrentit*. The health of the San Gabriel mountains was important to her, and PAS’ conservation initiatives were deeply appreciated.

Kyropoulos met previous PAS executive director, Lois Brunet, and previous development chair, Sok Tng, in 2022. She was graceful, eloquent and passionate about our work at PAS.

“Mary was a delightful human being,” remembers Brunet, who met her for the first time in a little coffeeshop on Los Robles. It was when she shared her well-thought-out plan to leave her estate to PAS.

“I was struck by her vitality, her enthusiasm for our work and all things avian, and her proud independent spirit. She told me: ‘I never married or had children. They used to call us spinsters, but you know what, I get to decide what to do with my money!’”

Brunet recalls when Kyropoulos called



appreciation for all of PAS’ educational efforts, but using the funds strictly for PAS education was not a requirement.

From the initial distribution, a little over \$100K will be allocated to support PAS education programs for the 2024/2025 fiscal year. This allows PAS to hire five assistant



to say a Great Horned Owl was perching in the canyon below her bungalow in South Pasadena. “I ran over to get a few pictures. I also wanted to give her a copy of our newly released *Birding Guide*,” she said.

“Mary wrote to thank me and had this to say about the guide: ‘As a retired librarian, I am glad to see how you have organized the material and what you have included. All most helpful to birders. I will call you the minute the second owl comes back.’”

Kyropoulos hadn’t been birding in years but still had the passion. She loved that we were connecting people, especially school children, to the outdoors and birds. “Mary wanted to support that work. I am so grateful for her gift and for the privilege of getting to know her. Thank you, Mary!” said Brunet.

### Carrying out Mary’s wishes

When Kyropoulos communicated her desire to include PAS in her will, she indicated her

directors for the Bird Science Program, aiming to launch the next generation of environmental educators and administrators.

As with all major financial shifts in an organization, exciting new plans will emerge soon after thorough consideration. This does not mean PAS will not continue to welcome donation gifts. Fundraisers for specific special projects, such as the redesigning of PAS’ website and the Motus tower program, will still take place.

PAS’ mission will always remain the same, but the strength behind it is certainly and immensely bolstered due to Mary Susan Kyropoulos’ incredibly generous gift.

We also want to thank Kyropoulos’ cousin, Wendy Waterhouse Wardlow, for her graciousness over the past few years, as the details of the bequest have been settled between PAS and the Kyropoulos family.



# SOCIAL BIRDERS

by Carl Matthies, photos by Sean Doorly

Eddie Cochran once sang, “There ain’t no cure for the summertime blues.” Well, clearly Mr. Cochran was unaware of Pasadena Audubon Society, which as usual had an action-packed summer of field trips and fraternizing! The customary Annual Banquet was held at Eaton Canyon Nature Center at the end of June. This year bird trivia was added to the program, while Lance Benner, Jerry Ewing, Michelle So, Mary Angel, Annabelle Aylmer, and Viveca

Sapin received awards for undeniably *non-trivial* donations of their time and talents to the organization. Another round of applause for these outstanding volunteers!

Bird walks continued apace despite the warmer temperatures. In recent years, PAS has been broadening the scope of its outings, and who better than professional wildlife guides Luke Tiller and Catherine Hamilton to lead a mid-June butterfly trip up Highway 39? A

second Luke-led excursion to Blue Ridge in the third week of July yielded montane specialties like **Townsend’s Solitaire** and **White-headed Woodpeckers**, and those lucky enough to join Oliver Huang and Darren Dowell at Cobal Canyon the following weekend got an eyeful of **Black Swifts** foraging directly overhead. And to think, things are only going to get more exciting come fall!

*Variable Checkerspot* © Katarina Doorly.  
*Black Swift* © Jeffrey Fenwick.

## Annual PAS Banquet



PAS Executive Director Jared Nigro chats with Paulett Llew and Mary Angel.



Programs Coordinator Jamie Cho, Kristina Dang, and Eric Vince dutifully lined up in alphabetical order.

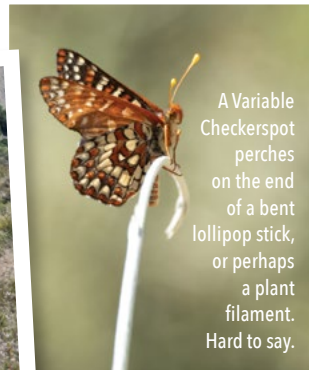


Field Trips Chair Darren Dowell gives Lance Benner a swag bag and a hardy handshake for leading field trips and contributing countless local bird recordings to the Xeno-Canto acoustic library.

## Field Trips



Luke Tiller employs the time-honored field technique of asking attendees to pick a point in space and scan it carefully for butterflies.



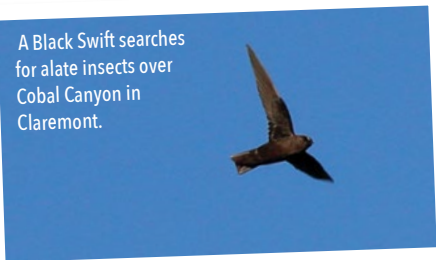
A Variable Checkerspot perches on the end of a bent lollipop stick, or perhaps a plant filament. Hard to say.

Kat Degner congratulates Jerry Ewing for his dedicated service to the PAS Bird Science Program



Brian Tomikawa, Gary Kinsley, and President Luke Tiller trade bird stories, which are a lot like fish stories, but without the forced perspective photographs.

A Black Swift searches for alate insects over Cobal Canyon in Claremont.



Jolee Kuo and her mother Celeste Lee take a moment to relax in the shade during the Blue Ridge field trip.



Birders eagerly await avian activity at feeders in the San Gabriel Mountains.





## BIRDING IN BRAZIL

Ella Smitheman-Nunes, nine years old

I have been a member of the Young Birders Club for about three years now. I have relatives in Brazil, so my dad, mom, and I fly out there every other summer to visit them. Both the city of Rio de Janeiro and the countryside have spectacular birding opportunities right outside my window.

Two years ago, a neighbor said they left a banana out for the birds. I loved the idea and tried it myself: not 30 minutes after I put the banana out, a **Bananaquit** showed up, with its yellow underbelly and brown and black feathers on top.

Soon it was scared away by a **Scaly Headed Parrot**, a regular-looking parrot with a gray head. After that, no birds came for a while, until a flock of **Green-headed Tanagers** flew in. They are strikingly beautiful birds with seven shades of green, blue, cyan, and yellow (hence the name in Portuguese, “sáira-sete-cores”, or seven-colors tanager). They stayed for about 20 minutes.

Another cool sighting was a **Channel-Billed Toucan** I spotted on a power line. It seemed

more interested in the traffic than the banana. I saw many things from my Rio apartment window, including more **Magnificent Frigatebirds** than seagulls.

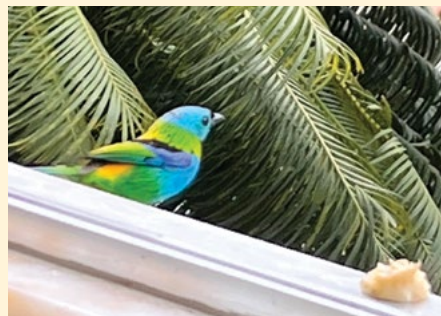
In the countryside of the Minas Gerais state, we visited a tiny town called Águas de Contendas.

Every morning, a bird conference took place in my yard, so I would do a little birdwatching just after waking up. I saw **Rufous Horneros**, **Masked Water-Tyrants**, **Great Kiskadees**,

and **Rufous-Collard Sparrows**.

Other sightings included **Long Tailed Tyrants**, **Crested Oropendolas**, **White-Eyed Parakeets**, **Social Flycatchers**, **Blue-Gray Swallows**, **Common Anis**, **Southern Lapwings**, and a **Guira Cuckoo**.

There are so many interesting birds there. And I saw so many that if I listed them all this article would turn into my Merlin Life List. So, if you ever go to Brazil, I recommend you take time to go birding.



Ella photographed Green-headed Tanagers (left) and a Scaly Headed Parrot investigating banana while vacationing in Brazil.

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

## know your bird

### KILLDEER

Oliver Huang

**K**ill-deah! Kill-deah! You are on the muddy shore of a lake, and a sandpiper-like bird takes off in front of you. As it flies, you notice two things: it has a very bright orange rump, and it is quite loud. What is this flashy bird? It's a Killdeer!

You often find these birds near water, such as Hahamongna, San Gabriel River Spreading Grounds, and Malibu Lagoon. They mostly eat insects, but killdeers also eat worms, seeds, and snails. They make calls that sound like “Kill-deer! Kill-deer!” hence the name “killdeer.” You may also hear them make rising “Dee-eh!” calls.

Killdeers are plovers, and the adult has two distinctive bands on the chest, and a brown head, back, and wings. During flight, they have a white wing stripe.

If a predator or birder gets too close to a nest, the parent will get up, walk a few feet, and pretend it has a broken wing to lure the predator away (or summon many camera lenses). Although this display may be fun to watch, it is best to back up, especially if you don't see the nest.

The eggs are very well camouflaged and look like stones. During the parent's “broken wing display,” the killdeer shows its bright orange rump, fans its tail, spreads its wings, and utters some dramatic calls.



Oliver photographed this killdeer in March at Hahamongna Watershed Park.

## BIRD SCIENCE PROGRAM: Growing Good Stewards of Nature

Mary Angel

When I began volunteering at Bird Science Program field trips, I especially loved witnessing the kids' genuine excitement the first time they saw a bird through binoculars. Inspired to learn more about the BSP, I signed up for docent training. What impressed me the most was not only the wealth of knowledge the instructors provided but also their sheer dedication to the program.

The driving force of the BSP today is its director Kathy Degner. Born in Pasadena, her parents were avid nature and bird lovers. But it was her grandmother, Elizabeth Degner (whom she never met), who influenced her the most.



Kathy Degner and 3rd graders from Washington Elementary during a school field trip to Peck Road Water Conservation Park.

© Mary Angel

Kathy's family bookshelves were filled with her grandmother's bird guides and Audubon prints. She held several records, including the earliest spring sightings in Jefferson, Wisconsin of a Black-Crowned Night Heron and a Magnolia Warbler in 1956. Rather than having a "spark bird" that drew Kathy to birding, she considers her grandmother her "spark birder."

After receiving her Master's Degree at the University of Pacific in Stockton, California, Kathy was hired to create a preschool speech and language program at Lodi Unified in 1988. For 13 years, she was a docent at the Micke Grove Zoo, in Lodi, where she was also a board member.

Kathy returned to Pasadena to care for her ailing parents, who were members of the Pasadena Audubon Society. She attended a PAS meeting in 2013, and shortly thereafter, with the encouragement of then president Deni Sinnott, she joined the board and put together the first PAS Outreach program.

The Young Birders Club was active then, but the desire was to make it more accessible to the community by developing a program to bring to the schools, specifically targeting those that qualify for Title 1 funding, where at least 40% of students are from low-income families and are eligible for free-reduced price meals. The first one was Washington Elementary STEM Magnet, followed by Jackson STEAM Multilingual Magnet Elementary and Madison Elementary.

Kathy joined forces with Lois Brunet, the program manager at the time, Vicky Salmon, and Laura Solomon to create a comprehensive program designed to meet the Next Generation Science Standards consisting of in-depth classroom sessions and outdoor field trips. It was then launched in 2019.

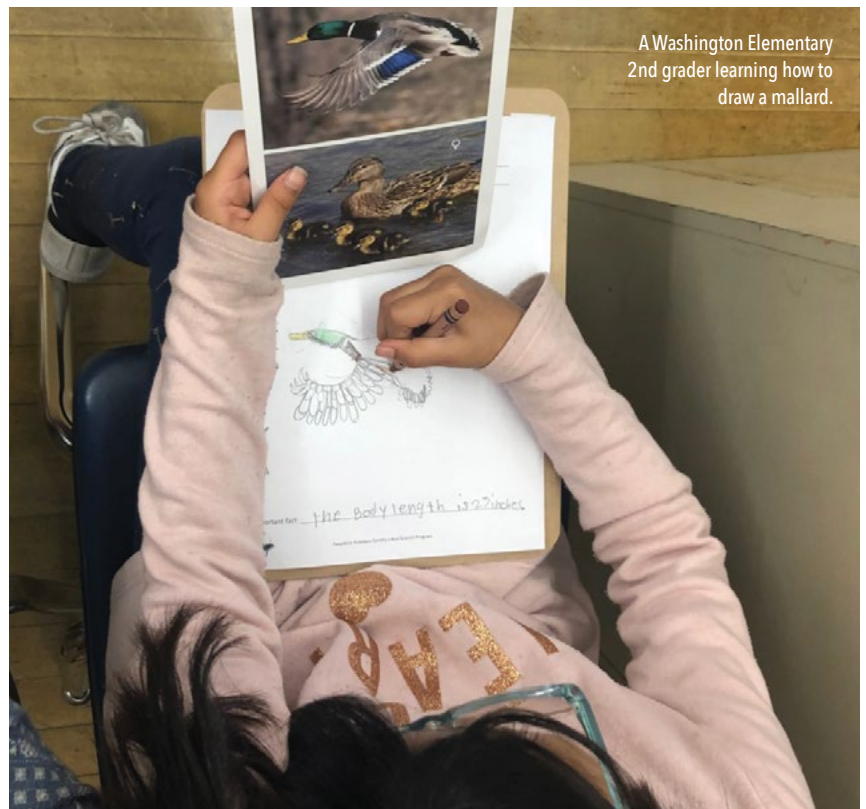
### Future Nature Advocates

In the docent training, I learned a wealth of information about birds, botany, and ecosystems. But for me, one of the greatest joys of the program has been working with the kids. After every field trip, once Kathy has made sure all the children are safely on the buses, she waves to them as they pull away. They wave back and make "hand hearts" at her through the windows.

"We have a legacy of growing great young birders who are going to continue to be great advocates for birds as they get older. We want this to continue because we don't want to lose a legacy like that," says Kathy.

"Whether it's the Young Birders Club, or the Bird Science Program, we don't expect every kid to grow up to be a birder. Our dream is to grow good stewards of nature, so they go out and appreciate what they see in nature and understand that we all have a place here."

"They realize what's important, grow up to be good voters, and vote for the people who care about the things they care about. If we can do that, we change the world."



© Lois Brunet



# Meet the Bird Science Program

3 Schools

35 Classes

835 Students

## The Program

- We work with TK/K through 5th grade.
- Each year, students attend a classroom session followed by a field trip on the same topic in the following week.

## Classroom Sessions

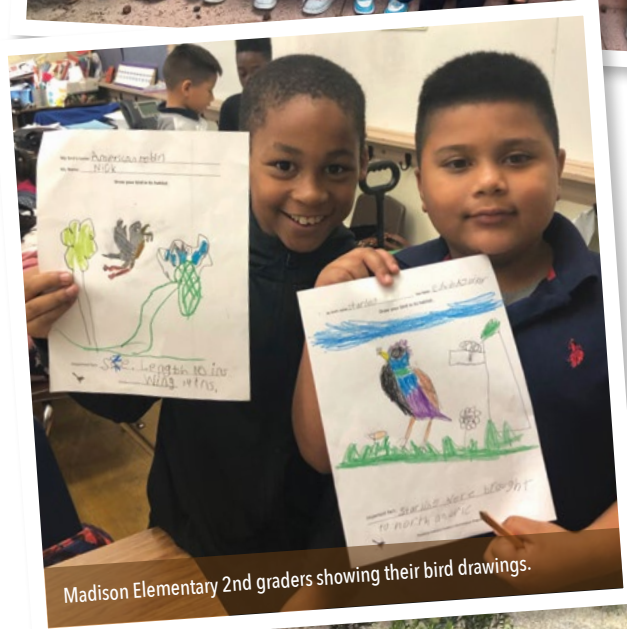
- Students might view feathers under a microscope, watch bird vocalization videos, examine owl pellets, or learn bird identification techniques.
- Students also learn about the environment, trees, and plants.
- School teachers are encouraged to continue with the PAS online educational videos.

## Field Trips

- For TK/K and 1st grade, field trips are on campus. Older grades are bussed to local parks or natural areas, such as Peck Road Water Conservation Park and Debs Park Audubon Center.
- Students are split into two groups. One group goes on a bird walk with binoculars we provide (TK/K & 1st grade use toilet paper roll binoculars) guided by trained docents or volunteers.
- The second group is engaged in activities covering the same topic they learned in the classroom. They might use tools (tongs, tweezers, etc.) to replicate different types of beaks, go on a nature scavenger hunt to identify nesting habitats, or learn about the challenges of migration.
- Then they switch activities. Students have a snack and a lunch break. The entire program usually runs for 3 1/2 hours.



Above: Jared Nigro and Evellyn Rosas with Washington Elementary kindergartners using toilet paper rolls as binoculars.



Madison Elementary 2nd graders showing their bird drawings.

Washington Elementary 4th graders at Debs Park learning how to use binoculars.



## ► Become a Bird Science Program Docent

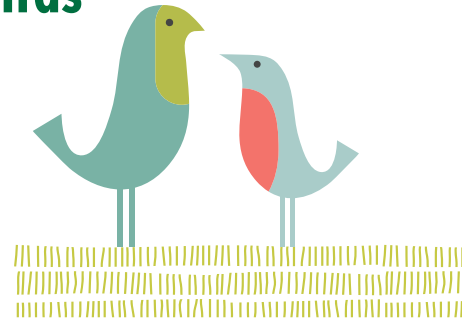
Our Docent Training starts in September. Check the Calendar on page 2 for more information and sign up at <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/bscience>

## What Each of Us Can Do to Support Our Local Birds

Dave Weeshoff

Pasadena Audubon Society's Conservation and Advocacy Committee addresses many opportunities to protect and improve avian habitat, assists other like-minded organizations achieve mutual goals, provides information and services to our communities in dealing with anthropogenic situations affecting wildlife, and supports avian-related science.

Three of these opportunities for all our members, followers, and their families are highlighted below. If you have any questions or would like to consider joining our Committee, please contact Dave Weeshoff at [weeshoff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:weeshoff@sbcglobal.net) or call (818) 618-1652, anytime.



### LOS ANGELES CATIO TOUR

► October 5, 2024: throughout our local area  
<https://www.losangelescatiotour.com/>

A “catio” is an enclosed outdoor patio for cats designed to provide a safe and enriching environment. It allows cats to experience the outdoors while preventing harm to both wildlife and the cats themselves.

Hundreds of millions of birds are captured and killed every year in the United States by outdoor cats. While there are no easy solutions to this huge problem, at least we can reduce that number.

This can be achieved by homeowners or apartment renters creating a cat patio (catio) which allows the cat to enjoy the outdoors without being able to attack a bird or other small animal.

On October 5th the Los Angeles Catio Tour invites cat lovers to visit 10 or more local catio installations, chat with folks who built them, and share ideas on how to create one in their own home.

The Los Angeles Catio Tour can help reduce the number of birds killed by outdoor cats as well as help cat lovers protect them from outdoor risks including diseases, parasites, injuries and coyotes.



### PROJECT PHOENIX

► Now through November at your local favorite birding spot  
<https://www.project-phoenix-investigating-bird-responses-to-smoke.org/>

PAS 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 just 10 minutes each week in a convenient location.

Project Phoenix is a community science project supported by UCLA and our L.A. Natural History Museum. The goal is to engage folks to monitor birds in their neighborhoods during summer and fall to learn how wildfire smoke and urban air pollution impact bird behavior and species distributions.

The program is open to birders of all ages and backgrounds including families and beginner birders. 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.

You may use the Cornell Lab Merlin app on your smartphone to listen for birds as an assistant. Reporting of the data is via eBird.



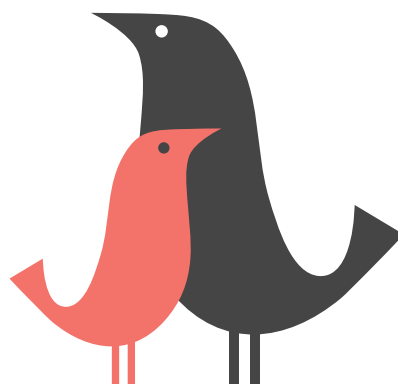
### PASADENA HUMANE SOCIETY WILDLIFE DAY

► October 6, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
361 S. Raymond Ave. Pasadena  
[pasadenahumane.org](https://pasadenahumane.org)

Pasadena Humane Society has helped thousands of injured, sick and orphaned wildlife (including birds) to release them back into the wild. Their team of wildlife veterinarians and technicians care for a variety of species onsite and partner with local wildlife rehabilitation organizations when more specialized care is needed.

This Wildlife Day event is all about celebrating our local wildlife and educating the community on how we can all pitch in to protect and respect them. PHS staff and volunteers, along with other interested wildlife organizations (including Pasadena Audubon Society) will have presentations, educational tables, and wildlife-related merchandise available.

PAS vice-president Dave Weeshoff will present “Partners in Avian Wildlife Rehabilitation,” highlighting the symbiotic relationships between PAS, PHS, and International Bird Rescue.





## GEORGE REICH: From Pilot to Dedicated Birding Educator

As a professional pilot for over three decades, I have been fortunate enough to witness stunning landscapes and diverse environments from the sky. The exhilarating feeling of soaring above the clouds and experiencing the freedom of a bird has left a lasting impression on me. Now, in my retirement, I have shifted my focus from flying like a bird to observing and studying these magnificent creatures.

During my travels, I have had the pleasure of meeting individuals who share a deep passion for nature. One such person is Peter Harrison, a renowned expert and author of “Seabirds: The New Identification Guide.” It was through his influence that I became interested in birding, which has now become my beloved hobby. In 2018, after retiring from my career, I joined the Pasadena Audubon Society, an organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats. Witnessing firsthand the challenges birds face in their struggle for survival, I felt compelled to contribute to the society’s efforts.

PAS recognizes that protecting birds requires more than just financial resources; it requires the dedication of volunteers. Motivated by this realization, I decided to become a PAS docent and enrolled in their first available class of the Bird Science Program Docent Training in September 2022 (more about the BSP on pages 6-7).

As a docent, I have the privilege of teaching children about birds and the importance of conservation. It is an immensely rewarding experience to guide young minds through the wonders of birds and instill in them a sense of responsibility towards our planet.

When the children arrive on field trips, their faces light up with anticipation and curiosity. For many of them, this is their first real encounter with the vibrant world of birds, extending beyond the confines of books and classrooms. As docents, our role goes beyond imparting factual information; we strive to ignite a spark of fascination in their hearts. Whether it’s through identifying different bird species with binoculars or mimicking bird calls, each activity serves as a bridge to understanding and appreciation.

Joining PAS and becoming a docent has not only allowed me to pursue my passion for nature but has also connected me with a community of like-minded individuals. Whether it’s participating in birdwatching



outings, volunteering for local conservation projects, or attending educational events, I have found camaraderie and inspiration among my fellow members.

It has enriched my life in countless ways. It has deepened my appreciation for the natural world, introduced me to a supportive and talented group of people, and motivated me to be a more effective steward of our planet. I eagerly look forward to continuing my volunteering efforts and hope to expand our educational programs to reach an even wider range of children.

Living in Pasadena provides us with a unique advantage in birdwatching, as we have the opportunity to observe a wide variety of birds. Even having a simple water feature outside my house has attracted an astonishing array of different bird species. I am always filled with excitement when I spot colorful birds like the Western Tanager or the Hooded Oriole. It’s impossible for me to choose a favorite, as each bird brings its own charm and beauty.

In conclusion, my journey from being a professional pilot to a dedicated bird enthusiast has been a transformative experience. Through my involvement with the Pasadena Audubon Society, I have discovered a profound connection with nature and a sense of purpose in conserving our avian friends. I encourage everyone to explore the world of birds and join hands in preserving the wonders of our natural world for future generations.

### ► a warm welcome to our newest members!

**ALTADENA:** Andrew Boada, Corrine Chu, Brian Clements, Briana Dacoscos & Justin Emsoff, Charles L Davis, Kirstin Ellsworth, Andre Giacomelli, Lucinda Haagenson, Charles A Hope, Valerie Jeffrey, Beth Powers & Scott Doudrick, Jose Razo, Sally Roberts, Lourdes Tamayo, Linn Wyatt  
**AZUSA:** Claudia Garcia, Hank Mager  
**BURBANK:** Peggy Wurtz  
**GLENDALE:** Lena Agdere, Meilin Chan, Karen Howard, Lisa Kwon, Charles H. Webb & Karen Schneider  
**HACIENDA HEIGHTS:** Richard Hu  
**LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE:** Raine Gordon, Hui Wang & Fang Cao  
**LA PUENTE:** Felipe Soto Jr  
**LANCASTER:** Anna Heming

**LONG BEACH:** Valeree Catangay  
**LOS ANGELES:** Erica Aghagholidzadeh, Mary Bleier, Paul Butler, Renee Fabian, Alexander Huerta, Reuben Lim, Rachel Raymond, Brooke Sauer, June Tan, Caleigh Wells & Austin Frank  
**MONROVIA:** Judy M Castagno, John Le, Harold Leavens, Peter Neumann, Joshua & Joshua Salinas  
**MONTEREY PARK:** Margarita Medina  
**PALOS VERDES:** Katrina Plummer  
**PASADENA:** Stephen Carroll, Robin Colman, Ellen Considine, Daniela Derriman, Michelle & Darcy Fenwick, Lawrence Forbes, Richard French, Betty Jo Gaddy, Ryan & Dana Haveson, Carol Impara, Beverly Johnson, Robert Johnson, Diana Lozano, Brie McWade, Emily Newman, William Pickering, Mike Polka, Gary Sattler,

Sharon Sibley, Clayton Smith, Steven R. Thompson, Barbara Wachsmann, Gary Wannlund, Auston Wilkinson & Haley Tilton, Robert Wolf, Martise Zachary, Brandon Zhao  
**PLAYA DEL REY:** Lakha Mathewkutty  
**RIVERSIDE:** Shan Zhong  
**ROSEMEAD:** Karen Cheung, Violet Ng  
**SAN GABRIEL:** Linya & Soung Kang, Toshiye Teraji  
**SAN MARINO:** James Zumberge  
**SANTA CLARITA:** Kimberly Peck  
**SIERRA MADRE:** Maia Belic  
**SOUTH PASADENA:** Tim Kenyon  
**SYLMAR:** Robin Comingore  
**TEMPLE CITY:** Marilyn Bayer, Andreas Feuerabendt, Kathleen Steiner  
**WEST HOLLYWOOD:** Marianne Gardner

# RENAMING BIRDS DOESN'T MEAN FORGETTING ORNITHOLOGICAL HISTORY

Ashwin Sivakumar

Dozens of birds in North America will no longer be named after people following a historic decision last year by the American Ornithological Society. Ornithologists and birders have long criticized eponyms (names after people) for lacking descriptive value.

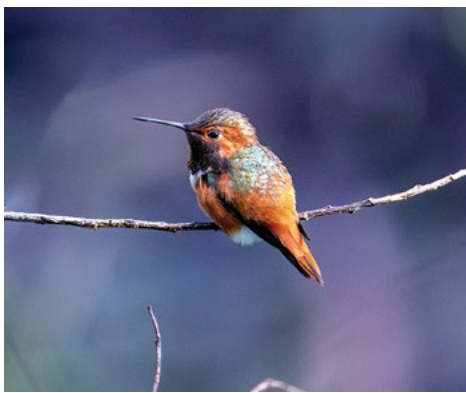
Most North American birds have a dynamic nomenclatural history. Standardization occurred no earlier than 1886 with the publication of the first checklist by the American Ornithological Union (AOU), and the names have persisted to this day.

The three local birds on this page illustrate that the monumental renaming project can be an opportunity to rediscover, rather than

forget, rich histories of descriptive names breathed into the lexicon by ornithologists and common folk but eclipsed by eponyms.

The project was spearheaded by two years of activism by the #BirdNamesForBirds campaign, and the complete list of birds can be seen here: <https://bit.ly/CurrentBirdNames>.

Do you have a name suggestion? Send it to us and we will publish the best ones in the next issue [pas.wrentit@gmail.com](mailto:pas.wrentit@gmail.com).



## Allen's Hummingbird

In 1877, Henry Henshaw recognized our familiar orange-and-green hummingbird as distinct from its northern cousin, the Rufous Hummingbird, calling it the "Green-backed Hummer."

Henshaw, mistakenly thinking a new scientific name was needed, named it *Selasphorus alleni* after Charles Allen, the collector of the hummingbird specimens that he studied (*Selasphorus sasin* was given in 1829 by French surgeon-turned-naturalist René Lesson).

D. G. Elliott, also in 1877, recognized tail feather shape as a more reliable trait and called it the "Californian" hummingbird. In 1880, ornithologist Robert Ridgway adopted "Allen's Hummingbird," with successive checklists preserving it over the preceding descriptive names.

© Francesca Pastine, Macaulay Library ML615623728



## Swainson's Thrush

The two subspecies of the elusive Swainson's Thrush were initially described separately.

In 1883, Ernest Ingersoll highlighted that the Western subspecies went by various names, including Russet-backed Thrush and "Oregon" or "Willow" Thrush. Its Eastern counterpart was known as Olive-backed and also "Little" or "Brown."

Initially, "Swainson's" was one of several names for Eastern birds in general, along with the equally widespread "Alice's."

Eventually, it encompassed the entire species when the two forms were lumped, leading to the loss of many names. However, as late as 1949, Arthur Cleveland Bent noted that logging communities in northern Maine referred to them as "Mosquito Thrushes," emphasizing their fly-catching habit.

Swainson came from the British illustrator William John Swainson, admired by ornithologists who used his name for many other species they discovered, such as a hawk, a flycatcher, and a warbler.

© Zak Pohlen, Macaulay Library ML615454100



## Brewer's Blackbird

Our iridescent, pale-eyed blackbird was initially described by German ornithologist Johann Georg Wagler in 1829. This was unknown to John James Audubon, who, a decade later, re-described the species, naming it after his ornithologist friend Thomas Mayo Brewer.

Wagler's Latin epithet, *cyanocephalus*, meaning "blue-headed," persisted in English, and "Blue-headed Blackbird" was documented as a common name by Ernest Thompson Seton in 1891 and Charles Bendire in 1895.

Even as late as 1925, 50 years after the first AOU checklist, zoologist George Finlay Simmons noted that "Blue-headed," "Yellow-eyed," "Square-tailed," and "Glossy" remained in vernacular use in Texas.

© Steven Meisel, Macaulay Library ML615610633



## FINDING MEDITATION IN BIRD WATCHING

Lena Agdere

It's Saturday at 6:30 AM, and my heart is pounding. Why do I feel anxious the moment I wake up? My thoughts swirl, and I decide to try meditation for a peaceful start to the weekend. I grab my phone, select a pre-recorded session, close my eyes, and focus on my breathing—in for three, hold, out for three.

But my discomfort grows, and my mind stays flooded with thoughts. My to-do list invades: laundry, cleaning, groceries—a relentless stream of chores. I open my eyes. Only a minute and a half has passed? It felt like an eternity. Frustrated, I close my eyes again, hoping to trick my brain into quieting down.

Yet, frustration builds. Another minute ticks by. This isn't the first time I've struggled with meditation. I envy others' peaceful practices, but today, it's clear this isn't working for me. I turn off the meditation app and spring out of bed. I know what I need: a walk in nature.

I quickly change clothes, grab my hat, water bottle, and binoculars, and head to one of my favorite spots, Descanso Gardens. The drive is a blur, my mind racing with thoughts.

I snap out of it when I hear the welcoming voice of one of the staff. "Good morning," he says with a big smile as I present my membership card and walk in. The minute I step foot into the garden, I take a deep breath. A simple, deep breath.

I continue towards the rose garden. It always cheers me up to "stop and smell the roses"—literally. So I do just that. My mind is still full of nagging thoughts, but at least the delicious scent of roses fills my nostrils. The first bird I catch with the corner of my eye is a little Dark-eyed Junco. I recognize it by the outer white tail feathers as it flies away when I lean in to

smell a rose. The fact that I even noticed makes me happy for a moment. I keep walking.



As I make my way to the pond covered with green algae, I wonder how many shades of green my eyes can process at once. I notice Mallard ducks paddling in the distance. I pull out my binoculars for a closer look. They seem to float effortlessly on the pond. I envision their paddling underneath the water and try to calculate how many beats per minute it takes to maintain their pace. I notice droplets of water on their backs shining like diamonds under the sun, their iridescent feathers reflecting the most vibrant green. A familiar sight, it makes me feel safe.

I lean against the wood fence with my binoculars in hand, casually looking around. I hear an Acorn Woodpecker in the distance. I don't even bother looking; I just close my eyes and listen. I hear the wind, and feel it on my arm as the sun peeking through the leaves gently kisses my face. I take a deep breath and notice how the chatter in my mind is gone. I feel at ease, safe, and present.

In these moments, I realize that bird watching has become my meditation. The sights and sounds of nature have a way of grounding me, of pulling me out of my anxious mind and into the present moment. The simple act of observing birds, of immersing myself in their world, quiets my thoughts and brings me peace. It's not about forcing stillness but finding it naturally in the beauty around me.

So, the next time anxiety strikes, I'll remember this walk in the garden. I'll know that peace is just a breath, a bird, and a nature walk away.

Illustration by Tara Hempstead. [www.tarahempstead.com](http://www.tarahempstead.com)

## pasadena audubon society board & staff

Luke Tiller	President	<a href="mailto:luke.tiller@gmail.com">luke.tiller@gmail.com</a>
Dave Weeshoff	Vice President	<a href="mailto:weeshoff@sbcglobal.net">weeshoff@sbcglobal.net</a>
Tricia Desmarais	Secretary	<a href="mailto:tricia.desmarais@gmail.com">tricia.desmarais@gmail.com</a>
Gary Breaux	Treasurer	<a href="mailto:gnbreaux@gmail.com">gnbreaux@gmail.com</a>
Chris Spurgeon	Programs	<a href="mailto:chris.spurgeon@pasadenaaudubon.org">chris.spurgeon@pasadenaaudubon.org</a>
Emily Allen	Membership	<a href="mailto:elallen54@gmail.com">elallen54@gmail.com</a>
Darren Dowell	Field Trips	<a href="mailto:dowell.darren@yahoo.com">dowell.darren@yahoo.com</a>
Ashwin Sivakumar	Advisory Board	<a href="mailto:ahs.birder@gmail.com">ahs.birder@gmail.com</a>
Fernanda Ezabella	Wrentit Editor	<a href="mailto:pas.wrentit@gmail.com">pas.wrentit@gmail.com</a>
Deborah Tammearu	Member at Large	<a href="mailto:revdeb.tammearu8@gmail.com">revdeb.tammearu8@gmail.com</a>
Helin Jung	Member at Large	<a href="mailto:helin.jung@gmail.com">helin.jung@gmail.com</a>
Kristen Ochoa	Member at Large	<a href="mailto:kristen.ochoa@gmail.com">kristen.ochoa@gmail.com</a>
Alex Coffey	Member at Large	<a href="mailto:coughster@gmail.com">coughster@gmail.com</a>
Jared Nigro	Executive Director	<a href="mailto:jaredn.pas@gmail.com">jaredn.pas@gmail.com</a>
Jamie Cho	Programs Coordinator	<a href="mailto:jamiec.pas@gmail.com">jamiec.pas@gmail.com</a>
Evellyn Rosas	Garden Educator	<a href="mailto:evellynr.pas@gmail.com">evellynr.pas@gmail.com</a>
Kathryn Degner	Bird Science Program	<a href="mailto:kathyd.pas@gmail.com">kathyd.pas@gmail.com</a>



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

Editor: Fernanda Ezabella | [pas.wrentit@gmail.com](mailto: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.  
For change of NAS address call (800) 274-4201.

**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



**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.*

### **GOLDEN EAGLE** (\$1,000 - \$1,999)

Harlan Irvine

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

Reilly Moss

### **ACORN WOODPECKER** (\$250 - \$499)

Sherra Fermino, David Weeshoff

### **CALIFORNIA THRASHER** (\$100 - \$249)

Ira Blitz, James W Graunke, Gregory Hachigian, Lisa Nasser, Laura & Gavin Solomon

### **WRENTIT** (\$5 - \$99)

Anonymous Donor, Anonymous Donor, Barbara Bellano, Jay Blake, Jane Bork, Tom Cassaro, Denaly Chen, Anette Cseri, Joan Depew, Leo & Christina De Vanhoof, Darren Dowell, Joan Dy, Jeanne Erikson, Renee Fabian, Lynzie Flynn, Gail Gibson & Connie Pearson, Leeann Hale, Miranda Johnson-Haddad, Susan Josenhans, Helin Jung, Mark Katigbak, Ruby Lassanyi, Mary Ann & Jeff Laun, Kate McDaniel, Phillip McRae, Carolyn Olney, Donna Schulman, Judith Sullivan, Kendall Tovar, John Witemberg

### **DAWN CHORUS** (Monthly Donors)

Emily L. Allen, Mertin Bern, Ava Bise, Hannah Carbone, Gesna Clarke, Kathy Degner, Gail Gibson & Connie Pearson, Karin Hanson, Sarah Hilbert, Jared Knickmeyer & Linda Elkin, Alice Lewin, Mario Mariotta IV, Krisen Ochoa & Shana Pallotta, Taylor Paez, Susan Reedy, Laura & Gavin Solomon, Chris Spurgeon, Elaine Tietjen, Cheryl Walling, Patrick Walling, Dave 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](https://pasadenaaudubon.org/donate). Dawn Chorus donors receive a beautiful enamel pin designed by PAS' own Patrick Walling and Graham Hamby!

**BIRDS & BEERS**  
4TH WEDNESDAY  
OF EACH MONTH  
5 PM TO 8 PM  
**WILD PARROT BREWING CO.**  
2302 E COLORADO BLVD, PASADENA