

the wren tit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 75 · NO. 1 | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2026



Townsend's Warbler © Tom Mills

executive roost 

Catching Up on Pasadena Audubon

By PAS Executive Director, Jared Nigro

Historically, Pasadena Audubon Society does quite a bit of taking inventory during the summer months. The heat makes local birding quite difficult after 10 am and all of our school programs are on break. It's a great time to reflect on our operations and how we can improve for the following September-June period.

The big story, at least for me and our new Treasurer, Christina Fung, is that PAS is going through its first-ever audit. Don't worry, it's actually a sign of prosperity. Because of the California Nonprofit Integrity Act of 2004, all charities and nonprofits must receive an audit if they have grossed over \$2 million in a year. We now qualify for an audit after receiving funds from the Mary S. Kyropoulos bequest in 2024/2025.

As nerve-wracking as it may sound, the audit experience has been quite fruitful thus far (underline "thus far"). I've had to collect over 48 unique financial and historical documents for our organization, dating back to our creation in 1904. It's been fun to see the names of past members, reflecting on what issues they had to tackle in the community and what birds they must have seen.

This period has also shown me how fortunate we all are in this moment. The organization was very much a club for many years. It's humbling to see that the blood, sweat, and tears from so many dedicated birders and environmentalists have brought us to today, where we have the luxury of dreaming up new programs, classes, and efforts. I hope we are making our past fellow birders proud.

Speaking of growth, have you heard about our new Master Birders Program? Are we crazy for trying to accomplish a 13-week intensive birding course? I hope so. Jodhan Fine, our already-esteemed 23-year-old Community Engagement Liaison, has been spending the summer creating the curriculum for this program. We've been referring to it as the "Hero's Journey of Birding." I quite like that idea.

We hope this class gives enough stimulation to the brain and spirit to allow people to find out who they are as a steward of this planet and how they want to contribute to birds and bird habitat. Our Audubon sibling, Western PA Audubon, inspired this idea with their six-month master birding course. They told us that students who have completed this class have

stepped into profound artistic, conservation, and leadership roles. Here's to hoping our Master Birders get some of that magic.

In terms of school programs, we have selected a new design for the Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School's native plant garden. Since we had to evacuate our previous space due to the 2025 Eaton Fire, PAS had to find a new home to teach our garden classes. Fortunately, through very kind donations from community members, we raised \$20,000 to install a completely new outdoor garden classroom. While there are many more steps to take, we hope to have this new area installed before spring 2027.

Lastly, I want to thank our outgoing PAS President, Luke Tiller. He is a total class act. It's been an honor to run this organization with such a world-renowned birder. How lucky am I to have been by his side and learned so much about our feathered neighbors.

I hope you and your loved ones had a wonderful summer. Now let's get busy welcoming the birds back for fall and winter.

September Chapter Meeting

► WEDNESDAY, 9/16 7:00-8:30pm - LIVE at Audubon Center at Debs Park • 4700 N Griffin Ave., Los Angeles

Mickey and Jon's Bird ID Quiz

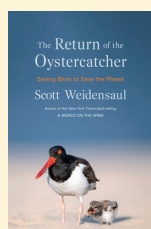
Continuing a fall tradition (about year 24!), Mickey Long and Jon Fisher will present the September Pasadena Audubon program on Bird Identification. They will display photos of mystery birds and closely related, look-alike birds for challenging discussion. Using field marks, seasonal occurrence, geographical 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.

Sign up at www.pasadenaaudubon.org/meetings

October Chapter Meeting

► WEDNESDAY, 10/21 7:00-8:30pm - via Zoom

Saving Birds to Save the Planet with Scott Weidensaul



At times it can seem hard to believe, but when it comes to birds, the future isn't all bad. Famed author and naturalist Scott Weidensaul has uncovered story after story of bird numbers rebounding, habitats improving, and hope rising. It's the subject of his latest book, "The Return of the Oystercatcher: Saving Birds to Save the Planet." Join us via Zoom and see if you don't end up feeling more optimistic too.

Sign up at www.pasadenaaudubon.org/meetings

Free Bird Walks

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

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

Dana Point Pelagic Field Trip

► SUNDAY, 9/20 7:00am-4:00pm

Price: \$140.00 per person

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

www.pasadenaaudubon.org/pelagic

Social

► WEDNESDAYS, SEPTEMBER 23, OCTOBER 28 5:00-8:00pm

Birds & Beers

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

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

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► SEPTEMBER 8, OCTOBER 13 7:00-8:30pm

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

birding

Popular Birding Podcasts to Add to Your Playlist

Whether you're identifying birds in your backyard, planning your next birding adventure, or simply fascinated by avian behavior, podcasts are a great way to deepen your knowledge. The best birding podcasts combine expert interviews, entertaining stories, practical identification tips, and the latest conservation news. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced birder, these shows may offer something to inspire your next outing.



"The American Birding Podcast" – Produced by the American Birding Association, this weekly podcast features conversations about bird identification, travel, conservation, and birding culture. Host Nate Swick welcomes scientists, authors, and experienced birders for engaging discussions that appeal to listeners of all skill levels.



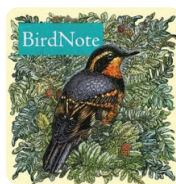
"Life List: A Birding Podcast" – Hosted by George Armistead, Alvaro Jaramillo, and Mollee Brown, "Life List" is known for its fun, in-depth conversations about birding, field experiences, conservation, and the unique culture surrounding the hobby. The hosts' enthusiasm and expertise make every episode enjoyable.



"The Science of Birds" – If you're curious about bird biology and behavior, this podcast is an excellent choice. Hosted by zoologist Ivan Phillipsen, each episode explores ornithology in an accessible, engaging way while diving into fascinating scientific discoveries.



"Hannah and Erik Go Birding Podcast" – Perfect for birders who love travel, this podcast follows birding adventures across North America and beyond. Episodes feature destination guides, interviews with birding experts, and practical tips for planning memorable birding trips.



"BirdNote Daily" – Short enough to enjoy over a morning coffee, these daily episodes highlight interesting bird facts, seasonal behaviors, and conservation topics in just a few minutes, making them perfect for busy bird lovers.



And of course, don't miss Pasadena Audubon's very own podcast: **"The Field Notes Podcast."** Hosts Jodhan Fine, Omar Alui, and Kelsey Reckling cover everything from bird identification and field skills to conservation history and memorable birding adventures, making it a great listen for both new and experienced birders.

PAS MEMBERS STAND UP FOR HAHAMONGNA

by Alicia Di Rado, PAS Board member and Publicity Chair

Six years after Pasadena Audubon Society's landmark settlement with Los Angeles County over the Devil's Gate sediment removal project, questions remain over the agreement's implementation.

In 2020, PAS and the Arroyo Seco Foundation settled a lawsuit with the county about the scope of the project after county officials agreed to reduce the impact on natural habitat at Hahamongna Watershed Park and to use hauling trucks with lower emissions. But some of the commitments remain unfinished, and others have been dialed back.

Led by former PAS board member Darren Dowell, several PAS members met with Los Angeles County Public Works on August 3 to request more protections for wildlife habitat at the park in Pasadena, nestled between Altadena and La Cañada Flintridge.

"The key 2020 settlement term for PAS was the return of 6.3 acres of project area in the riparian zone to a natural state, and so far only about half of that area has been recovered," Dowell said.

L.A. County Public Works engineers responded by highlighting the success of their habitat restoration efforts elsewhere in the basin and offsite, and the county's satisfaction of several other terms of the settlement agreement.

But during the meeting, PAS members noted that two narrow strips of land along the southeast and southwest sections of the Devil's Gate sediment area—4.46 acres protected in the settlement—are being graded and cleared too often, preventing native plants from establishing. The settlement envisioned these 75-foot-wide side strips as areas that would mostly remain undisturbed except after major debris-flow events, with low-flow channels sculpted to help irrigate native vegetation.

Construction of those channels on a nearly annual basis has led to the removal of emerging willows and mulefat and left behind piles of sediment that stunt plant growth, Dowell explained. The protected area is decreased and degraded further by a project vehicle route that cuts through the eastern side strip right where willow regrowth has been the most vigorous. This vehicle route into the reservoir does not appear in the Environmental Impact Report or the settlement.

County staff said that the channels serve an important engineering purpose. They provide



From the Big Dig to the Big Ditch? Although we are pleased to see new willows flourishing in the Hahamongna side strip (nominally) protected areas, we are discouraged to see them encroached on both sides by Public Works' engineering and maintenance practices, as in this photo from July 2025. While a low-flow irrigation diversion was an intended feature here, we learned recently that Public Works wants this diversion to be big enough to drive their vehicles through. Our PAS group has been pushing back on the County's activities in this area since 2024 and will continue to do so, aiming to return to the plan in the settlement agreement.

access for repairing erosion on restored slopes while minimizing disturbance elsewhere. Staff members also said trucks must use alternate routes because they would otherwise get stuck in muddy conditions near the dam.

They agreed to review PAS's concerns on maintenance practices and boundary locations.

In addition, PAS members asked county staff for updates on three Hahamongna projects that have seen limited progress: the southeast entrance, the Altadena Drain, and the Flint Wash.

The settlement requires the county to restore a more natural appearance to Hahamongna's southeast entrance. After the public feedback period in 2021-2022, this project experienced a series of delays and then was put on hold in 2025 to focus on wildfire recovery elsewhere in the county. At the meeting, Public Works staff said the project was recently approved, with construction scheduled to start this December and completion expected in October 2027.

The outlook is less encouraging for the Altadena Drain restoration area.

This 0.6-acre area was to be excluded from routine maintenance and restored as habitat, except when work was necessary to address erosion or drainage problems.

Instead, restoration has remained incomplete because severe erosion developed around the drain outlet. The erosion is so significant that Public Works engineers plan to launch a new project to stabilize the outlet, improve maintenance access, and eventually allow

habitat restoration to proceed. Construction is scheduled for 2029.

PAS members expressed concern that the restoration has been paused for years. They asked county staff to consider providing alternate locations for protected bird habitat while engineers negotiate challenges in the Altadena Drain and side-strip areas.

Members also sought an update on the Flint Wash excluded area.

The settlement designated about 1.22 acres near Flint Wash to undergo limited routine maintenance to protect habitat. But restoration—including regrowth of the willow forest—has progressed slowly. Volunteers have documented repeated infestations of invasive plants.

County staff agreed that Flint Wash presents challenges. The area receives a continual supply of invasive plant seeds from the upstream urban watershed, and access is limited because it remains underwater through much of the year before annual sediment removal begins. Public Works said it is evaluating new management approaches that would provide longer maintenance windows while continuing to protect sensitive habitat.

PAS members recognized the success of the broader habitat restoration effort, and they agreed to continue productive talks with county staff.

In addition to Dowell, PAS was represented by Executive Director Jared Nigro, board members David Weeshoff and Alicia Di Rado, and volunteer and former board member Helin Jung.

BEYOND BRAZIL'S BEACHES: Birding the Atlantic Forest of Serra do Mar

Words and photos by Fernanda Ezabella,
former *Wrenit* editor and PAS Board member

For most visitors, Brazil's coast in São Paulo means beaches. I spent my teenage years going there for summer vacation. Then, last May, I skipped the sand and surf altogether. I was looking for birds.

I turned inland to climb the misty mountains of Serra do Mar, where one of the world's richest—and most threatened—forests still survives. Stretching across eastern Brazil, the Atlantic Forest once covered an area nearly three times the size of California. Today, only fragments remain, but they still shelter an astonishing concentration of wildlife.

The northern coast of São Paulo and the southern coast of Rio de Janeiro form one of the areas with the highest concentration of bird species in the Atlantic Forest, including about 130 endemics. My guide, ornithologist Luciano Lima, from the tour company Brazil Birding Experts, calls this region “the eye of the hurricane” for Atlantic Forest birds.

“In just a few miles, you climb from sea level to more than 3,000 feet,” he explained. “And each elevation has its own bird community.”

Inside Serra do Mar State Park, in the Caraguatatuba section, silence quickly replaces the bustle of the coast. Along shaded trails, enormous jequitibá trees tower above delicate juçara palms, a keystone species threatened by illegal harvesting. Before long, a troop of **Black Capuchins** moved through the canopy while brilliantly colored tanagers gathered at a feeding station, joined by the striking **Yellow-fronted Woodpecker**.

The park's manager, Miguel Nema, has worked here for nearly two decades. He has seen jaguars only through camera trap footage, but his greatest passion may be the birds. Carrying a small handmade whistle—known locally as a pio—he recreates the songs of forest species with remarkable precision.

Ironically, the whistle was confiscated from wildlife poachers. “What was once used to exploit wildlife now helps people appreciate it,” Nema told me. “Birding has become one of our best tools for environmental education.”

That night, the forest revealed another treasure: the deep, haunting call of a giant **Tawny-browed Owl** echoing through the darkness.

On the island of Ilhabela, we searched for the endangered **Black-fronted Piping-Guan**,



Scale-throated Hermit at Macuquinho Lodge, Salesópolis (São Paulo).



Yellow-fronted Woodpecker at Serra do Mar State Park in Caraguatatuba.

a spectacular turkey-sized bird of the Atlantic Forest. We struck out—but the forest had another surprise waiting.

Local bird guide Fernando Moraes (Instagram: @fernandobirdingilhabela) has spent years earning the trust of a **Uniform Crake**, an elusive rail that most birders hear far more often than they ever see. Armed with a small can of mealworms, Moraes softly called, “Come on, Dedé,” using the nickname he gave the bird.

After a while, the shy crake stepped cautiously into the open. “I first found her in 2020,” Moraes said. “Some days I left here almost in tears because she wouldn't come close. But I kept trying.”

His patience paid off. What began with only a handful of clients each year has grown into more than 100, many of them international birders hoping to see Atlantic Forest specialties. He also knows how to attract other rarities, such as **Star-throated Antwren**, **Tufted Antshrike**, and **Slaty Bristlefront**, and where to find an active **Ornate Hawk-Eagle** nest.

Birdwatching has become an increasingly important part of Ilhabela's tourism economy. Since 2019, the island has hosted Ilhabela Bird Week, celebrating one of Brazil's premier birding destinations.

Back on the mainland, retired electronics technician Jonas D'Abronzio has turned his own property into another birding haven. At Sítio Folha Seca, dozens of hummingbird feeders

attract an astonishing diversity of species along the edge of Serra do Mar State Park.

Visitors don't pay admission. Instead, many bring bags of sugar or fruit to help feed the birds.

During my visit, hummingbirds zipped in every direction. A **Festive Coquette** flashed its ornate crests, a male **Brazilian Ruby** glittered in the sun, and a **Saw-billed Hermit** hovered only a few feet away. Colorful tanagers crowded the fruit feeders nearby, transforming an ordinary backyard into one of Brazil's finest birding locations.

Our final stop took us farther into the mountains, where another family-run lodge overlooks hummingbird gardens and carefully maintained photo hides. As guests sat down for breakfast at Macuquinho Lodge, the owners were already preparing fruit and mealworms for their feathered regulars.

In one of the blinds, owner Elvis Japão set out some mealworms and, as a final touch, rang a little bell that brought in a **Red-and-white Crake** almost on cue. It was a fitting farewell from the Atlantic Forest, as we headed back home to the concrete jungle of São Paulo city.

By skipping the beaches, I found a magical mountain and also something even more memorable: a rainforest where birds are drawing people back to nature and creating livelihoods for local communities. It offers hope that one of Earth's most extraordinary ecosystems still has a future.



Environmental Stewardship in Costa Rica

Words and photos by Jordan Almeda, 10th grade

Since I took on birding as a passion and hobby at the age of 9, I have always dreamed of traveling out of the country to see wildlife. Upon visiting my high school in early 2025, I was presented with the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica during the summer of 2026. So of course, I said “yes”! I wouldn’t pass on an opportunity like this!

The trip was nine days long, and was focused on the theme of Environmental Stewardship, with a three-day long conference and the rest of the time to explore the country. It’d be my first time for a lot of things—traveling by plane, traveling outside the country, and being away from family for a big trip. I grew a bit nervous when the week I’d leave finally came around.

During my time at the conference, I heard different speakers talk about their personal experiences in environmental conservation, and they sparked a passion in me I hope to carry through my life: That there is, in fact, a place in science for young biologists to show their fascination and love for the natural world.

Our next part of the journey was in the province of Limón, all the way on the Caribbean

side of the country, staying at a small lodge known as Bungalow Malú. We arrived at night, and I could already hear the crashing of waves right across the road from the bungalows. The rainforest was almost hugging the lodge with how close it was. The buzzing of insects and the strange, mechanical chirps of **grackles** already told me that I was in for an experience that would be nothing like the bustling city of San José.

I had intended on setting an alarm for myself at 5:30 am to go birding around the bungalows with our tour guide and two other birders who happened to be on the trip, but found myself laying awake in bed at 4:50 am instead with the chorus of practically every living thing outside my window singing all at once. Stepping outside, the cool, thick morning air greeted me by fogging my glasses with a mind-boggling humidity level of 92%.

Later that day, as we explored Cahuita National Park, I’d seen some strange creatures—an **arachnid** that was almost 100% legs, three vibrant-yellow **pit-vipers**, and three **Keel-billed Toucans** that were amazingly close to us. **Leafcutter ants** were also hard at work as they

marched through the forest floor with various foliage. To see so much life in one place existing and working in harmony within a perfect system was just so fascinating. During our last morning in Limón, our group was bid farewell by the deep roars of male **howler monkeys** in the trees behind the bungalows. It was a sound I knew I’d never hear in the wild again for a while.

The final day of adventure took place at Braulio Carrillo National Park in Heredia, where we rode on a sky tram through the rainforest. Every few minutes, the forest below us was showered with rain as the shrieks of **Scarlet Macaws** echoed through the canopy. It was the most beautiful thing I’d ever witnessed.

I was over 2,000 miles away from family, but it felt like I was right at home. And for me, that’s what the beauty of nature is. Nature welcomes you into its home with open arms, and it will always welcome you, so long as you show it the same care it holds for you. It holds no judgement against you, so long as you don’t judge it. From this experience, I hope that someday I can return to Costa Rica and help keep it as beautiful as I remember.



A Keel-billed Toucan, Cahuita National Park



Clay-colored Thrush, the National Bird of Costa Rica, Veragua Rainforest



Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Irazu Volcano



Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Braulio Carrillo National Park

Three Pillars of Bird Habitat Loss—and What We Can Do

by Dave Weeshoff, PAS Conservation Chair

As we plan our Conservation activities for the coming year, I believe the major issue will be preserving and enhancing the habitat for our local birds here, along with an appreciation for their migratory destinations. While window strikes, outdoor cats, and other anthropogenic causes of bird deaths have a measurable impact on our local abundance of birds, habitat loss is the most consequential.

Included in the list of major habitat issues are the impacts of Climate Change, Regulations (local, state, and federal), and the availability of Water Resources. It gets complicated as these are not discrete issues with individual solutions, but with inexorably interwoven causes and effects. But let's try to address them individually.

Climate Change



Birds have evolved or adapted (and are still evolving) to live in what I call their Goldilocks environment or biome—not too hot or cold, wet or dry, high or low elevation, etc. Since we live in a Mediterranean climate in California, our rainfall and temperatures are accommodating to many species of birds, but importantly the plants the birds need for food, nesting, and other activities.

We humans are changing local biomes as a result of burning fossil fuels—coal, oil, natural gas—to provide our basic needs of food, energy, transportation, agriculture, and shelter. I suggest “local biomes” since the greenhouse effects are unique to us as a result of our adjacency to the ocean, mountains, desert, water resources, and sunlight, which may be summarized by dramatically changing annual rainfall and temperatures.

As Pasadena Audubon members, we can apply climate science to imagining solutions to reduce our city's carbon footprint. For example, PAS has supported the “Pasadena 100” movement to provide Pasadena customers with totally carbon-free electricity by year-end 2030. These suggestions include innovative solutions to batteries, rooftop and balcony solar panels, financial incentives to save electricity, as well as consistently encouraging our local government to strategically plan to achieve their 2030 goal.

Regulations



While California is an innovative state for wildlife (including bird) protections, there are frequent situations where those protections come in conflict with other civic responsibilities for transportation, housing, agriculture, and other factors. Consistent with our PAS Mission Statement, we must continue our support for bird habitat conservation while appreciating where conflicts require compromise.

On the November 3, 2026, ballot, Proposition 45 proposes changes to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 and demands serious, thoughtful consideration, pro or con, by each of us. The CEQA “requires that state and local agencies disclose and evaluate the significant environmental impacts of proposed projects and adopt all feasible measures to mitigate those impacts.”

Federal regulations regarding wildlife and their habitats are being stretched, challenged, violated, and under- or overenforced unlike any period in our history. Clearly, we must understand these issues and act accordingly in furtherance of bird abundance. We will encourage our elected officials to help us.

Water Resources



Southern California has been in and out of a water crisis since its earliest days, and is facing multiple threats, both in potential flooding due to “atmospheric rivers” of heavy rain as well as years of drought. Most of our water is imported from Northern California, the Colorado River, or the Sierra Nevada mountain's snowfall, although through various aquifer replenishment projects, some local areas can pump up to 60% of their needs from underground.

The Regional Water Quality Board monitors the quality of urban runoff and, along with Los Angeles County Safe, Clean Water Program revenues, is encouraging nature-based solutions to mitigate water pollution from our streets and parking lots and also provide aquifer replenishments and storm-water reuse. We are also following three discrete Arroyo Seco water projects plus the Descanso Gardens Stormwater Capture system.

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

BIRDS & BEERS

4TH WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH

5 PM TO 8 PM

WILD PARROT BREWING CO.

2302 E COLORADO BLVD, PASADENA

SOCIAL BIRDERS

Words and photos by Sean Doorly

Pasadena Audubon members explored the world of butterflies on June 13 at the Butterflying for Birders field trip, led by PAS President Luke Tiller. The group made several stops in the San Gabriel Canyon area to catch peak butterfly activity south of Crystal Lake. Highlights included Tailed and Gorgon Copper, Gabb's Checkerspot, Mountain Mahogany, and Nelson's Hairstreak.

That evening, members gathered at Mijares Mexican Restaurant for the Pasadena Audubon Society's 2026 Annual Banquet and Trivia Quiz. The event featured a taco buffet, awards, prizes, volunteer recognition, and a birding-themed Jeopardy-style trivia contest. It was a fun evening celebrating another successful year for Pasadena Audubon with good food and great company.

The month wrapped up with Pasadena Audubon's first Barks & Beers on June 24 at Wild Parrot Brewing Company. Members gathered on the back patio with their canine companions for an evening of conversation and craft beer. Wild Parrot donated \$1 per pint purchased. Judging by the turnout, Barks & Beers is off to a howling start.

Butterflying for Birders



All great field trips start in a parking lot.



Luke is an open book when it comes to butterflies.



The butterflies went that way.

Annual Banquet



Van Pierszalowski and Alicia Di Rado are all smiles.



The perfect gift for Luke.



Elizabeth Tatum and Jodhan Fine.

Barks & Beers



Carl Matthies toasts his canine (and human) companions.



Carl's dog.



Elizabeth Tatum's dog.

COMMON POORWILLS TEN MINUTES FROM HOME

Words and photos by Shuxing (Miles) Wang

While browsing eBird one evening, I noticed something surprising. I came across several checklists reporting **Common Poorwills** at a trail called Mount Lukens Truck Trail, less than 10 minutes from home. Although I had seen and heard Common Poorwills before, I never had a chance to observe one up close; they were all far away when I saw them. So, I decided to check it out the next evening.

Just ten minutes later, we got to the trailhead. It was almost like we entered another world: It was away from human noises, full of birds, and gave us a stunning overview of Los Angeles and even some of the ocean near the skyline. We started walking on the trail, and **Wrentits** and **Ash-throated Flycatchers** were constantly calling everywhere, and a pair of **Lawrence's Goldfinch** showed up. We even found two snake tracks crossing the dirt road that were both perfectly preserved.

The sun soon fell behind the ocean in the distance, and I turned on my headlamp. We did not have to walk very far before a glowing orange eye suddenly appeared in my headlamp beam. It was the eye shine from our target Common Poorwill! We walked a little closer, and we could clearly see the Common Poorwill quietly resting on the road.

The Common Poorwill is quite small for a nightjar, even smaller than a Mourning Dove. It is all gray and black but has a white collar, some white at the edge of the tail, and some buffy feathers near the collar. It sits quietly and then suddenly launches off the ground and flutters in the sky like a butterfly before finally landing back in the exact same spot. It's more like a flycatcher, and not so much like a Lesser Nighthawk that chases insects like a swallow.

Also like some flycatchers, the Common Poorwill has long bristles around its bill, which are supposed to protect the huge eyes during bursts of fast flights. When its head turns at the right angle, it shows its brilliant purple, orange, and yellow eyeshine, which was even present in the sky when it decided to change its spot and flew away.

Just as we thought the evening was already complete, another Poorwill flew over my head and landed on the side of the road behind some bushes. We went over to the side and could kind



Common Poorwill (top), beautiful views from the trail, and Ash-throated Flycatcher (right).

of see an eye shine obscured by lots of vegetation. We moved around to the other side, and the bird was right in front of us, only a few feet away! We slowly moved a little bit, just enough to make it completely in view, with no obstacles in front of it at all.

I took tons of photos, and it finally flew away. It was hard to believe these amazing birds live so close to home, and they are so abundant on this little-known trail. We made our way back to the car as we took our last look at the unbelievable view from the trail. I was left wondering how many other trails across the San Gabriel foothills are still waiting to be explored; there must be way more Poorwills than we thought.

PAINTING THE BUTTERFLIES OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Words and artwork by Karen Sutherland

California is home to more than 170 butterfly species, each adapted to unique habitats, from coastal dunes and oak woodlands to mountain meadows and desert landscapes. From the state's official butterfly, the Monarch, to the Painted Lady, or the Variable Checkerspot, these butterflies provide striking subjects for realistic art.

Careful observation of their intricate patterns, subtle color variations, and delicate wing textures helps me to create work that is scientifically accurate and emotionally engaging. Oil as a medium is especially well-suited for this subject because its rich pigments and slow drying time allow for smooth blending, luminous color transitions, and fine detail that captures the fragile elegance of butterfly wings.

Each butterfly's distinctive markings and brilliant colors can be rendered with careful layering of transparent glazes and precise brushwork, creating an illusion of a living butterfly poised on native wildflowers, thereby emphasizing the relationship between the butterfly and its environment. Native plants such as milkweed, the California poppy, lupines, and ceanothus provide natural settings that enrich the composition and highlight the ecological importance of these pollinators. Attention to accurate lighting, soft shadows, and natural backgrounds enhances the sense of depth and realism.

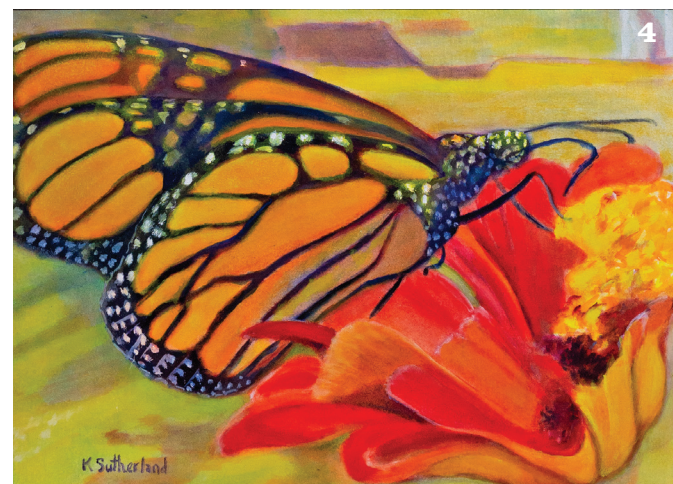
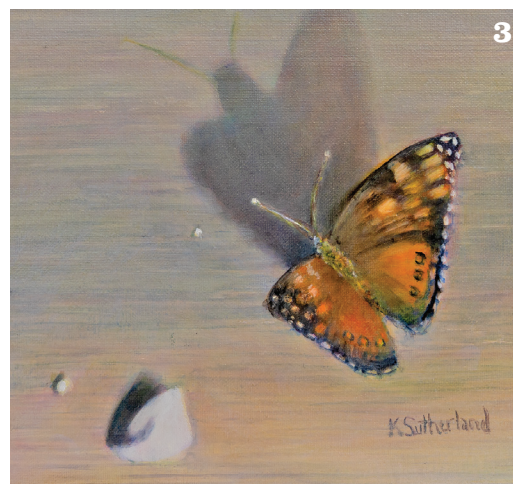
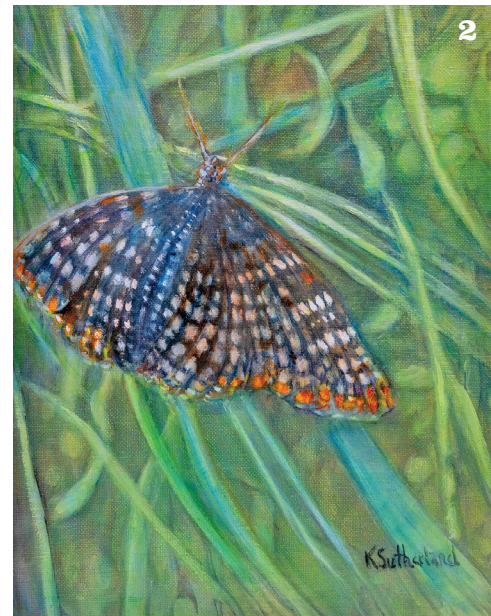
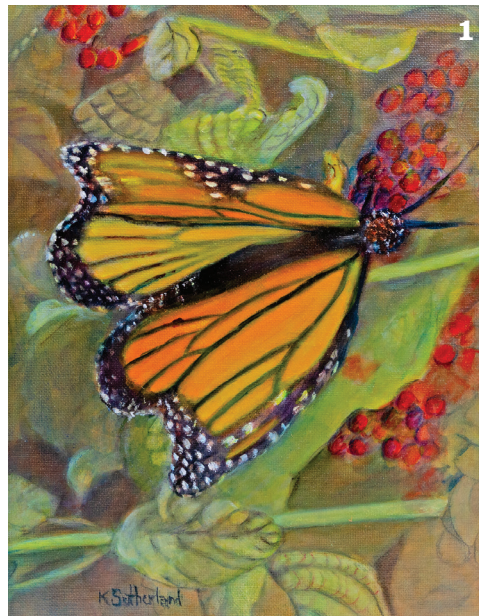
Beyond their visual appeal, oil painting California's butterflies serves as a reminder of the importance of conservation. Habitat loss, climate change, and pesticide use threaten many butterfly populations. By portraying these remarkable insects with realism and respect, my art seeks to inspire you, the viewer, to appreciate their beauty and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. It is more than a decorative work of art—it is an enduring tribute to California's natural heritage and a gentle invitation to protect the delicate balance of our environment for future generations.

1. *Monarch*. Oil on panel. 9x12 inches.

2. *Variable Checkerspot*. Oil on panel. 9x12 inches. Painted in Pasadena.

3. *Painted Lady*. Oil on panel. 9x12 inches. Painted after the Eaton Canyon Fire in Altadena.

4. *Monarch*. Oil on Paper. 9x12 inches. Painted in Los Angeles.



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