



Drawing by  
Guy Coleleach

# THE WRENTIT

Founded 1904

**Pasadena Audubon Society**  
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

Volume 58 — No. 2

*To bring the excitement of birds to our community through birding,  
education and the conservation of bird habitats.*

March-April 2010

## March Program

### Nerds and Birds

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

John Garrett

Due to a generous grant from the Pasadena Audubon Society, 16-year-old John Garrett was able to attend the American Birding Association's 2009 Young Birder Conference. Based in San Diego, California, he naturally didn't see very many life birds, although that wasn't the purpose of the conference anyway. Besides meeting new fellow teenage bird-nerds, he had the opportunity to visit parts of the state he hadn't (or at least not very often) before, improve his feeble sketching skills, and learn about what it means to be a young birder in this generation. Come join John as he relates his unique experiences from a unique conference!

**General Meetings Held At  
Eaton Canyon Nature Center  
1750 N Altadena Drive  
Pasadena CA  
Social 7:00 pm, Program 7:30 pm**

## April Program

### Tricolored Blackbirds

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

Jon Feenstra

The Tricolored Blackbird is North America's only colonial nesting land bird and is nearly endemic to the state of California. In the past century the statewide population has seen a precipitous decline, and for nearly 15 years state and federal agencies have been monitoring and trying to save major breeding colonies. For the past few years the population in Southern California has been attracting more attention. In this presentation Jon describes the latest results of how our local Tricolored Blackbirds are doing and what's on the horizon.

Jon Feenstra is a freelance ornithologist living in Los Angeles. He works as an ecological consultant and bird surveyor, and as a tour leader for WINGS. When he's not looking through binoculars he cooks, reads, climbs, bikes, listens to music, and travels the world.

## May Program

### Head Honcho

Wednesday, May 19, 2010

John Fitzpatrick

Dr. Fitzpatrick is the L.A. Fuertes Director of the Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University. He is on the forefront of many conservation and birding movements and will present a special program on this date. See the May *Wrentit* for more details.

Dr. Fitzpatrick has published over 130 scientific articles and books. He is an expert on the Florida Scrub-jay and has described seven new bird species of tropical birds that he discovered. He has lead scientific expeditions to South America and to the South Coast of U.S. in search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

## Elections

Nominations for officers will take place at the April general meeting. Election of officers will take place at the May general meeting.

## President's Perch

Lois & I just got back from a birding trip to Peru, with a 6-day river cruise on the headwaters of the Amazon River. In the hot, humid rainforest, we saw beautiful birds like Trogons, Parrots and Toucans — and strange birds like the Hoatzin and Horned Screamer. The jungle is also home to several species of monkeys and bats — we saw large Fishing Bats that pick little sardines out of the shallow stream with their wing hooks (it's true; we saw them fishing at dusk). The oddest mammals we saw on

the trip were the Three-toed Sloth (ugly?) and the freshwater Pink River Dolphins (yes, they were pink).

We lucked out with only one rainy day. When it cleared, our guide found a termite-infested tree that flying ants were leaving. We anchored the boat and watched 38 species of birds gather around the tree to feast on the ants!

The trip was great but we were both happy to return home to beautiful Southern California.

## In This Issue

<b>Conservation</b>	2
<b>Trip Reports</b>	3
<b>Field Trips</b>	5
<b>Calendar</b>	6
<b>Fiction</b>	7
<b>Birdathon</b>	8
<b>Announcements</b>	9
<b>New Members</b>	10
<b>John's Corner</b>	10

## Conservation and Education

### Hahamongna and the City

On February 1, at its City Council meeting, the Pasadena City Council voted to approve the amended plan for the Hahamongna Annex. Luckily they also, at the insistence of Councilmember Terry Tornek, voted to approve almost all the various Commissions' recommendations as guidelines for the implementation of this plan.

What this means is that it is in writing that they will not build a road through the Annex, and that they will do what they can to save all mature trees.

The Plan shows much effort on the part of the City to be as green as possible, and they see it as a model of sustainability. Let's hope so!

What is still frustrating is that many of us are not quite sure what they approved that night. It seems to be a jumble of very clear and detailed plans mixed in with vague ideas. Like Kathi Ellsworth told the Council last night, they wanted to get a "building permit without a blueprint." It is also not clear how much public comment, if any, will be allowed for all of the many smaller plans that fit under this umbrella of plans. I heard conflicting statements that night.

It is also frustrating that while the City applauds itself on responding to most of the concerns raised that night by the public, they never responded to my concerns about protecting bird species of special concern that breed in Hahamongna. None of these birds are mentioned in the City's now seven-year-old EIR for the Hahamongna Master Plan.

The most frightening moment was when the City's attorney, who has been reviewing the CEQA procedures for all of this, asserted that chaparral does not provide for as much bird diversity as trees, and is designed to burn. Yikes! Unfortunately, this remarkably ignorant comment came after the time for public comment, and illustrates how important it is that we do what we can to get protected status for chaparral.

However, all was not lost. After the vote, I was able to speak with Rosa Laveaga, the City Staff in charge of this Plan. She asked for all of our bird data (from our regular point counts) and she

listened when I told her of the utter inaccuracy of the City Attorney's statements about chaparral. I offered to connect her with Richard Halsey, Director of the Chaparral Institute, and she is very interested. Hooray!

Thank you, PAS, for all of your support. I am especially grateful to Ron Cyger (who clapped loudly when I told the Council that "Birders Vote!"), Mark Hunter (who spoke), Kathi Ellsworth (who spoke), Hugh Bowles (who spoke), and Tori Collender (who waited with me until the bitter end at 11:15 pm). If I missed any other PAS people who were there, please forgive me.

So, it's not a bad compromise, but there is still work to be done. Thanks for all that you do. Now we have to be on guard as the City Council will be deciding what to do about athletic fields in Hahamongna in the next few months.

*Laura Garrett*

### Station Fire Update

On January 27th, at Eaton Canyon, Judy Noiron, the USFS Forest Supervisor of the Angeles National Forest, provided an update on the Station Fire. It started on August 26, burned 161,189 acres, and was not fully contained until October 16. All four watersheds were impacted, and it will take 3-5 years until the ground has recovered enough to avoid major mudslides. It will take 10-20 years for the chaparral to recover, and much longer for the forested areas to recover. The fire damaged or destroyed hundreds of miles of roads and trails, and many buildings, including the Mt. Vetter Fire Lookout and the Mill Creek Fire Station, with about \$26 million of infrastructure damage and another \$22 million of work to do before the rains began. The rains finished what the fire started in that the Angeles Crest Highway above La Canada is severely undermined, as is the Angeles Forest Highway. Both are closed for the foreseeable future, with the ACH likely to open first.

Of the native flora and fauna, reptiles, fish and amphibians are especially at risk from mud and debris flows. Because of this, a team of FS employees and others captured many of the most endangered species, such as Speckled Dace and Unarmored 3-spine Stickleback, and is holding them in captivity until it is safe to

reintroduce them. Otherwise, they may have been completely wiped out by debris flows.

23% of the burned area (37,000 acres) was forested, and the FS plans to replant the 11,000 acres that will not come back on its own. They will be working with TreePeople to accomplish this Herculean task, and are hoping to plant 4,000 acres in 2011. To put this in perspective, in most years, they replant 150 acres. In December, they ordered seedlings for the 4,000 acres, and wiped out the entire seed stock.

Ms. Noiron cited two main reasons why the forest is still closed. The first is public safety. Because so many trails are damaged and undermined, because the rains keep adding to that list, and because mudflows are always a risk, it is safer to keep the forest closed until the rains are over and the FS can do another assessment. The second reason the forest is closed is that the FS is deeply concerned about invasive non-native seeds coming into the forest on people's shoes, clothes, and dogs, and they see this as one of the biggest threats to the forest. (Personally, I see another fire before the forest has had a chance to recover as a bigger threat, but they did not address this). The FS anticipates that the forest will remain closed for at least the rest of the season, until next September.

Many people have contacted the FS to volunteer their services, and there is much work to be done. The FS will especially need help with trail building, tree planting, and invasive species removal. Though many people want to work in the burn area, the FS asks that volunteers be willing to work in other FS managed areas. These areas will probably see more use because of the closure areas, and so they will need to be upgraded and maintained more concertedly.

The one spot of hope in all of this is that the fire provides, as Ms. Noiron puts it, a chance to "do it better." She says the FS can do a better job of trail location and infrastructure, with green buildings and forward-thinking innovations. As she put it, some of the forest that burned down were old tree plantations. They won't be doing that anymore! This is more evidence that the Angeles National Forest is more of a recreational area than an area managed for its timber.

If you wish to volunteer, or you'd like more information, please visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/angeles/>.

## Trip Reports

### Salton Sea

February 6-7, 2010

Pasadena Audubon spent the weekend of February 6th at the south end of the Salton Sea. The rain came down on Saturday and made many roads difficult. But with many good eyes we had about 120 species including:

- ..... An adult Yellow-footed Gull at Red Hill Marina;
- ..... A Summer Tanager, two Gray-headed, and one Pink-sided Junco at Evergreen Cemetery in El Centro (eastside);
- ..... 200 Mountain Plovers in the field at the southeast corner of Blair and Lindsay and another 28 Mountain Plovers on the north side of Rutherford Road just West of Highway 111;
- ..... 30 Mountain Bluebirds in the field at Sinclair and Blair, but on the east side so actually between the railroad tracks and Blair;
- ..... A Cackling Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Yellow-shafted Flicker, and three Vermilion Flycatchers at Sunbeam Lake County Park;
- ..... Six Blue-winged Teal were in the first pond at the SSNWR Head Quarters; and
- ..... A Zone-tailed Hawk found by Santa Monica Audubon (thanks Lillian and Chuck) and a Vermilion Flycatcher at Cattle Call Park. We all had good views!

*Ron Cyger*



*Wardrobe malfunction, Salton Sea style*

### Bolsa Chica

January 23, 2010

When we arrived at Bolsa Chica, we knew it would be a great day when one of our first birds was a Clapper Rail, who put on quite a show for us just off the parking lot (a Sora joined in for a few seconds as well). We were only halfway across the boardwalk when a Reddish

*continued on page 9*

## Christmas Count Results

2009 produced another very successful Pasadena/San Gabriel Valley Christmas Bird Count. How successful? The total continued to grow as checklists kept coming in. Thanks to 54 dedicated participants and very good coverage of the circle, we recorded a new count high of 169 species for the day, with an additional 2 for count week.

Any inland count that pushes 170 is doing very well. This year our total was aided by birders who made a number of good finds that remained for the count. To be sure, there are always a few scratch-your-head misses, but that's inevitable when conducting a census in a single 24-hour period. But this year the misses were few.

The weather cooperated with clear, calm and mild conditions, and while most observers felt that overall numbers of birds were low, in the end the total was just 5% below the recent average. The total number of birds recorded for 2009 was 23,722.

Invasive or irruptive species were nearly absent, save for a couple of Lewis's Woodpeckers and a handful of Golden-crowned Kinglets. These results also reflected the story in southern California as a whole.

We managed to record most everything that could reasonably be expected, plus a variety of vagrants. Here's a look at the highlights...

An immature Snow Goose found earlier at Almansor Park in Alhambra was counted, and a Greater White-fronted Goose and a now essentially resident Ross's Goose were at Legg Lake. Having only recently been split from Canada Goose, there isn't much count historical data on Cackling Geese. This year we had 5 Cackling Geese, well up from one, but below the 2007 high of 8.

Some ducks were encountered in very low numbers as evidenced by the mere 14 Northern Pintail, 3 Blue-winged Teal and 9 Cinnamon Teal that were recorded. Ducks are highly mobile and numbers of birds at a specific locality can fluctuate greatly depending on conditions and sometimes for no obvious reason.

Just one Canvasback and one Redhead (the latter the first since 2000) were recorded. Neither species is rare in the region, and Canvasback numbers in particular fluctuate markedly on the count. For example we had 35 last year and 3 the previous year.

A good bird for the count was an American Bittern at Legg Lake, the first since 2005. There's precious little suitable habitat in the circle for these marsh birds.

A great find was the Wood Stork at Legg Lake. This bird was discovered a week before the count and was considerate enough to remain for the count. It later moved to Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas where it was last seen on January 3. While definitely the most remarkable bird of the 2009 CBC, there is actually a previous count record from 1979. Significantly, that bird was also at Whittier Narrows. It was repeatedly seen in the Mitigation Lakes Area where it remained for five months. So keep an eye out for them here.. although you might have to wait quite a while for the next one.

Raptors included an about average 4 Merlin and a lower than average single Peregrine Falcon. Also represented by single birds were a Northern Harrier and a White-tailed Kite, both seen at Santa Fe Dam.

Along the San Gabriel River, 56 Greater Yellowlegs was the highest count in over 10 years, while one Lesser Yellowlegs- very rare on the count- was the first since 1995.

2008 was a great year for gulls, but this year numbers were way down across the board. Western Gulls dropped from a count high of 675 to 113, Herring Gulls from 18 to 1, Thayer's Gulls from 2 to 0 and Glaucous-winged Gulls from 79 to 3. Quite a remarkable difference, and illustrative of the fact that each count is different; sometimes remarkably so. Some of these variations are the result of the changing availability of habitat, but other factors are also at work. Glaucous-winged Gulls, for example, were present in extraordinarily large numbers coastally as well as inland last winter but scarce everywhere this winter.

It's hard to imagine that Spotted Dove counts on the CBC used to average above 80 birds. As a teenager just becoming aware of birds in the 1970s, I recall seeing them in my backyard daily. A sharp decline became obvious after the mid 1980s. Just one Spotted Dove was found this year. They weren't missed on the count until 2003 and there are now only 3 records from the last 7 Pasadena CBCs.

As usual, an array of parrots and parakeets were found on count day, with the usual slew of birds at the Arcadia roost site late in the afternoon. We recorded a total of 9 species.

Aside from 7 Great Horned Owls, a single Barn Owl was found on count night and just one Western Screech-Owl was turned up in the early morning hours.

Mild weather prior to the count stirred a few Common Poorwills, with 2 found on count week along the Henninger Fire Road. This constitutes only the second count record.

162 Allen's Hummingbirds was a high count, with this species not recorded until 1987. They have spread rapidly in recent decades, now outnumbering Anna's in some places.

Lewis's Woodpeckers were more common than usual in southern California this winter and 2 were seen at the San Gabriel Country Club on count day. Numbers of this species vary each year and they often go unrecorded. A very good bird for the count was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that's been wintering in Arcadia. The last count record was in 1997. Also of interest were 7 Red-breasted Sapsuckers, which was a count high for that species.

While access to Mount Wilson proved impossible in the aftermath of the Station Fire, Henninger Flat proved to be a fairly worthy substitute. It does require a good hike to reach it, but the rewards were worth the effort. Both a Williamson's Sapsucker and White-headed Woodpecker were found there.

A Gray Flycatcher continued for the count at Lacy Park in San Marino and was the only Empidonax recorded. Unexpected but very welcome was a Tropical Kingbird at Legg Lake. This bird was found just by chance by a birder who wasn't even counting for the CBC. The only other count record was from 2006. Also notable was a high count 45 Cassin's Kingbirds.

Wintering Loggerhead Shrikes continue to persist in small numbers after this species experienced a significant decline in the 1990s. Two were found on this year's count.

Three Cassin's Vireos were found, which was an above average number. The typically more common (in winter) Plumbeous Vireo was missed on count day, although we did get one for count week.

Several species of swallows often winter locally in small numbers. This year 7 Tree Swallows and 2 Northern Rough-winged Swallows were seen along the San Gabriel River and in the Whittier Narrows area.

Introduced Red-whiskered Bulbuls continue to do quite well with 116 counted. Most of the population resides at the Huntington Gardens and Arboretum, but a few records from elsewhere in the circle indicates some expansion of their range.

Surprisingly, only one Marsh Wren was found, along the Rio Hondo. Likewise, there was a single American Dipper in Santa Anita Canyon.

Six Golden-crowned Kinglets were indicative of the above average numbers in southern California this winter. They are rather scarce on the Pasadena CBC, being recorded on less than a third of counts in recent years.

Though their distribution is very local within the circle, with a little effort California Gnatcatchers appear to be not too difficult to find. Five were found this year in the Montebello Hills.

Two Mountain Bluebirds that had been at Santa Fe Dam for some time remained to be added to the count list.

When I first began birding- more years ago than I care to

remember- my impression was that the only warblers here in winter were Yellow-rumped Warblers and Common Yellowthroats. I would have been quite surprised at the numbers of warblers found on the count this year.

Nine Yellow Warblers were found, almost all along the San Gabriel River. In 2008 11 were recorded, with these last two years producing the highest counts ever. They are now relatively easy to find in winter in willows along the river.

Four Black-throated Gray Warblers, 45 Townsend's Warblers and 6 Wilson's Warblers were typical numbers, and a bonus Hermit Warbler was at Legg Lake. Hermits, always scarce in winter, have recently been rare but regular on the count.

A Black-throated Green Warbler in Pasadena in the trees in front of Panda Inn in January was found too late for the count, but was almost certainly present on count day. Vagrants turn up in the most unexpected places and one wonders how many other birds remain undiscovered.

A hardy Painted Redstart returned for its fifth winter in Monrovia Canyon. It has been counted in 3 of those 5 years.

In Whittier Narrows, a Summer Tanager found earlier in December was counted, the only one since 2000.

Interesting sparrows included one Vesper Sparrow at Santa Fe Dam, just 3 Fox Sparrows and one 'Slate-colored' Junco.

Small numbers of introduced Northern Cardinals are resident in the Whittier Narrows area and we managed to pick up a single bird there on count day.

132 Great-tailed Grackles was an above average number and Tricolored Blackbirds were present as usual at Legg Lake where regular in winter. Tricolored Blackbirds are rarely found elsewhere on the count.

There were also good numbers of the introduced Nutmeg Mannikins, with 90 recorded. Speaking of introduced birds, we also recorded 227 House Sparrows. Thorough checking of the many McDonald's and 7-11 parking lots in the circle would no doubt produce quite a few more.

We put forth a very good effort, with equally good results.

It's worth noting that there are several key areas which produce a remarkable number of unusual birds as well as high numbers of more common species. Without these places, the number of species we find would be markedly lower.

The Whittier Narrows area and the San Gabriel River are especially critical to the count in this regard, while Santa Fe Dam produces its own special birds. Though all of these areas have been altered from their original state, they continue to provide habitat for a remarkable variety of birds including many vagrants.

The Pasadena count circle offers so much diversity in terms of habitat, ranging from close to sea level to over 5000 feet and from montane woodland to lowland riparian, fields and wetlands. This mix of habitats makes each year interesting and different.

As most will already know, all the data from the Pasadena and other counts is available to anyone on line at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc>. Our count code is "CAPS".

Finally, a major thank-you to all the counters who participated to make the Pasadena CBC successful. And also to the volunteers who set up for the great post count dinner at Eaton Canyon Nature Center. It was a very enjoyable day and evening, as always. I'm already looking forward to December 18, 2010.

*Jon Fisher*

**Field Trips**

**Bird Banding in Malibu**

**Saturday, March 20, 2010**

**6:00 am — noon**



Santa Monica College professor Walt Sakai has operated a banding station in Zuma Canyon for many years. This is a rare opportunity to watch the methodical approach to bird capture, measurement, and banding, and get close-up looks at some beautiful specimens in the process. Note the early start time, targeted to maximum bird activity. Learn more about Professor Sakai's work at [homepage.smc.edu/sakai\\_walter/banding.htm](http://homepage.smc.edu/sakai_walter/banding.htm)

Reservations are required and the trip is limited to 10 participants. Contact the trip leader for details.

*Lance Benner*

**Owling in the San Gabriels**

**Saturday, March 27, 2010**

**6:00 pm — midnight**



Six owl species breed in the San Gabriel Mountains, five occur year-round, and several are at or close to the southern edge of their range along the Pacific slope. This trip will search for Northern Pygmy, Northern Saw-whet, Western Screech, Great Horned, and Spotted Owls, which all vocalize at this time of year. We will start shortly before sunset, when we'll look for Northern Pygmy Owl and diurnal montane

species, and then after dark we'll look for the others and for Common Poorwill, which is active in this area. Limited to 10 people. Fire-related road closures may affect the route and time. Please email or call the trip leader to reserve a spot and for other trip logistics.

*Lance Benner*

**Elysian Park Walk**

**Saturday April 10, 2010**

**7:30 am — noon**



Where can you hear the call of an Oriole, the crack of a baseball bat, and gun shots from a police academy firing range? In Elysian Park of course! We'll meet at 7:30 a.m. to prowl through this park-like setting for orioles, tanagers, warblers, and sparrows. There is always a surprise here including a Painted Redstart for a several years. We will bird Solano Canyon then go to a second area as time allows.

Directions: Take the Pasadena (110) freeway south, exit on Academy. Proceed about 1/2 a mile and take a right on Solano Canyon Dr. for another 1/4 mile to the parking area on your left. See you there!

*Sue Horton and Ron Cyger*

**Hansen Dam**

**Saturday, April 17, 2010**

**7:00 am—11:00 am**



Hansen Dam is a fantastic birding location that includes riparian habitat, parkland, a lake, and a seasonal

pond. Over 280 bird species have been recorded here. Among the birds we will look for are Bell's Vireo, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Blue Grosbeak.

It is a moderately long walk through this large park, so bring appropriate footwear. Meet at 7:00am in the Hansen Dam Recreation Center parking lot, along Foothill Blvd. just southwest of the Osborne/Lake View Terrace exit off the 210 freeway (this is NOT the main Hansen Dam Park parking lot off Dronfield Avenue).

*Mark and Janet Scheel*

**Big Morongo Canyon**

**Saturday, May 8, 2010**

**7:30 am — afternoon**

The desert oasis at Big Morongo Canyon is one of the ten largest cottonwood and willow riparian (stream) habitats in California. The upstream end of the canyon lies in the Mojave Desert, while its downstream portion opens into the Colorado Desert.

Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is an internationally-recognized birding site. Several rare or unusual species are known to nest here, and many other species are abundant during the spring and fall migration seasons.

Meet with Pasadena Audubon to walk the easy paced trail in the preserve led by Kathi Ellsworth and Lance Benner. Bring lunch and lots of water.

**More trips on page 9!**

**Eaton Canyon Monthly Walk**

**Sunday, March 21, 2010**

**Sunday, April 18, 2010**

**Sunday, May 16, 2010**

**8:00 am – 11:00 am**



Pasadena Audubon and Eaton Canyon Nature Center are cosponsoring monthly walks at Eaton Canyon. The walks are led by Hill Penfold, who has been leading them at ECNC for many years. Hill is wonderful with birders of all levels and Eaton Canyon is one of the best locations to learn the birds of the Pasadena area.

The walks are held on the third Sunday of each month. Meet at the flagpole: bring water, binoculars, hats, but no dogs.

*Hill Penfold*

**Hahamongna Monthly Walk**

**Saturday, March 6, 2010**

**Saturday, April 3, 2010**

**Saturday, May 1, 2010**

**7:30 am — noon**



This monthly bird walk is for birders of all ages and experience. A good variety of birds should be in residence. Bring binoculars, birding guide, water and wear walking shoes. No dogs.

Exit the north 210 at Berkshire and make a right, then a left at Oak Grove. The Hahamongna Watershed Park entrance is on the right at the next stop light. Take the first left after entering Hahagmongna, and park by the ballfield.

*Ron Cyger*

**Huntington Library Monthly Walk**

**Sunday, March 28, 2010**

**Sunday, April 25, 2010**

**Sunday, May 23, 2010**

**8:00 am – 11:00 am**




A special benefit for Pasadena Audubon Society members is the chance to bird the Huntington Library grounds. Attendance is by reservation only and limited to 15 participants. Members may bring one non-member guest, space permitting. We thank our member and Huntington curator, Dan Lewis, for making these trips possible.







Contact Elaine by email (preferred), putting "Huntington" in the subject line to avoid inadvertent deletion or by phone.

*Elaine MacPherson*

**Calendar**  
 Submit material for the next Wrentit by April 1st







 = Wrentit Club!

**March 2010**

Date	Day	Time	Event	Location	Leader*
3	Wed	7:30 pm	Board Meeting	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Will Fulmer
6	Sat	7:30 am	Field Trip 	Hahamongna Watershed Park	Ron Cyger
16	Tue	9:00 am	Magpie Study Group 	Santa Fe Dam	Madeline West & Sid Heyman
17	Wed	7:00 pm	General Meeting	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Program: Nerds & Birds
20	Sat	6:00 am	Field Trip 	Bird Banding, Malibu	Walt Sakai, Lance Benner
21	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Hill Penfold
27	Sat	6:00 pm	Field Trip 	Mountain Owling	Lance Benner
28	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Huntington Library Gardens	Elaine MacPherson





*(PAS members only)*

**April 2010**

3	Sat	7:30 am	Field Trip 	Hahamongna Watershed Park	Ron Cyger
10	Sat	7:30 am	Field Trip 	Elysian Park	Ron Cyger
17	Sat	7:00 am	Field Trip 	Hansen Dam	Mark & Janet Scheel
18	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Hill Penfold
20	Tue	9:00 am	Magpie Study Group 	Rancho Santa Ana	Madeline West & Sid Heyman
21	Wed	7:00 pm	General Meeting	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Program: Tricolored Blackbirds
25	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Huntington Library Gardens	Elaine MacPherson

*(PAS members only)*

**May 2010**

1	Sat	7:30 am	Field Trip 	Hahamongna	Ron Cyger
5	Wed	7:30 pm	Board Meeting	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Will Fulmer
8	Sat	7:30 am	Field Trip	Big Morongo	Ellsworth/Benner
15-16	Sat-Sun	All day	Field Trip	East Mojave	Ellsworth/Benner
16	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Hill Penfold
18	Tue	9:00 am	Magpie Study Group 	Lower Arroyo Seco	Madeline West & Sid Heyman
19	Wed	7:00 pm	General Meeting	Eaton Canyon Nature Center	Program: John Fitzpatrick
23	Sun	8:00 am	Field Trip 	Huntington Library Gardens	Elaine MacPherson

*(PAS members only)*

**\* Trip Leader Information**

Mark Scheel (Chair)	(626) 355-8707	SCHEEL@TAPIR.CALTECH.EDU
Larry Allen	(323) 288-2701	LARRYALLEN@EARLYMUSICLA.ORG
Lance Benner	(626) 791-1187	LBENNER@CHARTER.NET
Ron Cyger	(626) 449-3625 <i>(before 9 pm)</i>	RON@CYGER.ORG <i>(preferred)</i>
Kathi Ellsworth	(626) 564-0652	PANDIONSKY@YAHOO.COM
Jon Feenstra	(626) 792-4346	FEENSTRA@ALUMNI.CALTECH.EDU
Jon Fisher	(818) 800-2776	JONF60@HOTMAIL.COM
Nick & Mary Freeman	(818) 247-6172	MNFREEMAN@EARTHLINK.NET
Sid Heyman	(626) 571-5991	
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Madeline West	(626) 574-0429	WEST266@ADELPHIA.NET

## The Ferruginous Hawk

Dad had already left, and I was just finishing my breakfast when Grandfather came into the kitchen, pulled out a chair and sat. Right on time again. Funny how an old man keeps such a regular schedule.

As he always does at this time, he pushed the book toward me and said, "Pick a good one today."

Mom set a plate of food down and said, "Eat your breakfast, Grandfather."

I looked at her. Mom in the morning. Her rollers. Her impassive voice. So flat, so mechanical. I thought, funny that she always calls him Grandfather. He's my grandfather. It was just her way.

"Pick a good one,"

Grandfather said.

It was a beat-up and well used old bird book. He knew all the birds in it by heart. As was our little custom, I closed my eyes, flipped through the pages and poked my finger suddenly down onto one.

We both looked to see what bird I picked for him.

"Ferruginous Hawk?" he said.

"First time I ever gave you that one."

"A challenge, all right," he said.

"Eat your breakfast, Grandfather,"

Mom said.

•

When my grandfather was my age, he liked the birds, and knew their names. Since he retired, he'd taken up bird watching again. It got him out of the house so Mom could do her work during the day.

To make it interesting for him, one morning long ago, I kiddingly picked a bird at random from the old book and said, "See if you can spot this guy."

Every day after that we played the same game. Evenings at dinner, I'd ask him how he did, and he'd lie, "No problem, kiddo. Just gotta know where to look."

Mom would say, "Eat your dinner," to both of us.

•

That evening, on the day I'd given him "Ferruginous Hawk," Grandfather didn't come back. When Dad came home from work, we went to look.

"Damn foolish, this bird thing of

his," Dad said. And I could see he was worried more than mad.

Grandfather's tracks were easy to follow, and they went on for more than a mile. When we found him, he was barely alive.

### TwoFistedBirdwatcher.com

The Wren Tit will sometimes run bird-related fiction and poetry, and in this issue we feature a writer and birder, Mike Lubow, whose credits include stories in *Playboy* and a well-received column in the *Chicago Tribune*. His web site, from which this story is reprinted with his permission, is a rich collection of birding experiences, featuring a regular guy's point of view, quite different from most birding sites. His blog, "Daily Sightings," is what tweets in Twitter could be like, if the tweets were longer. And good. And about birding.

There are also works of fiction like the one on this page, an opinionated and interesting bibliography, contests for valuable prizes (well, prizes, anyway), random observations, and guest speakers, as it were. Check it out.

He was lying bareheaded on the ground, his face awfully gray, his breath shallow and raspy.

"I saw one," he said to me, his excitement plainly there under the weakness.

"Let's get him back," Dad said. We collected Grandfather's things, got him up and breathing better, and led him home.

"I saw one," he said again.

We were still feeling worried and serious, so I didn't say anything back. I was tempted to say, "Ferruginous Hawk?"

It could wait.

•

Once inside, Grandfather's breathing became completely normal, and his strength returned. He went directly to the kitchen table, sat, and began leafing through his bird book, looking at it harder than I'd ever seen him look at it before.

Dad sat and said, "Pop, this bird thing, it's gone too far. You've got to stop."

Grandfather didn't even look at him, but just kept studying the book, turning its pages and looking at them one by one.

"Pop?"

"Shhhh."

"Eat your dinner, Grandfather,"

Mom said.

Then Grandfather closed the book

and put it down gently on the table.

"I saw one," he said to me, and smiled. But it wasn't his usual smile.

I didn't know what to say now.

Dad said, "Saw one what?"

Mom said, "Eat your dinner, Grandfather."

Grandfather threw the bird book at Mom then, and when it hit, it hit hard, exploding, and all those brittle old pages flew around the room, scattering themselves over the floor.

Grandfather stood, and in one smooth movement, surprising for an old man, kicked Mom in the side hard enough to knock her off her rollers.

She fell onto her side with a clang. Sparks flared under her. And the room smelled of hot ozone.

"Eat your breakfast, Grandfather," Mom said, her voice flat. Then she said it again, and Dad had to get up and switch her off.

•

"What's gotten into you, Pop! First you practically kill yourself, going around without your air helmet. Then you break the robot!"

"I saw one."

"One what?" Dad screamed.

"One bird."

"There aren't any birds, Dad. Not for at least fifty years!"

"What kind was it, Grandfather?" I said.

Dad said, "Stay out of this, son."

Grandfather looked at me and laughed. "It wasn't no Ferruginous Hawk, I'll tell you that much."

Mike Lubow







**Big Morongo, continued**

See you there!

Go east on Interstate 10, then north on Hwy 62 to Morongo Valley. Turn east on East Drive for one block to turn left at Preserve Sign (11055 East Drive). Park in the lot at the end of the lane. It usually takes about two hours to get to the preserve from Pasadena.

*Kathi Ellsworth & Lance Benner*

**East Mojave**

**Sat-Sun, May 15-16, 2010**

This is the year to visit the East Mojave Preserve! Due to recent rain, there should be carpets of wildflowers and their ephemeral beauty is something everyone should see. We will search for Gray Vireo, Gilded Flicker, Gray Flycatcher, Bendire's Thrasher, LeConte's Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, Lucy's Warbler, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Black-chinned Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow (singing like a canary!), "Woodhouse" Western Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Chukar, Scott's Oriole, and many, many others. We will camp for one night on Saturday, May 15th.

We will meet at 7am on Saturday morning and then travel the dirt and paved roads of the East Mojave Preserve near Cima Dome, Kelso, the New York Mountains, the Mid-Hills, and the northern Lanfair Valley.

The trip will be limited to 10 people. Email or call Lance Benner for more information and to sign up.

**New Members, continued**

Margaret Polinsky, Rebecca Rasmussen, Kaylene Redfern, Neal & Carol Salisian, Sumalee Sangsurasak, Farideh Shahbazi, Helen Shufeldt, Norberto Sugui, Nina Webster, Kevin Williams, Maybelle Wolfe; **ROSEMEAD:** Mike Chacon; **SAN GABRIEL:** Carol Kauper, Kristine Lowe; **SAN MARINO:** Hilary Dorsey, Andrew Havens; **SIERRA MADRE:** Matt Frey, Dimitri Mawet, Nina Smith; **SOUTH PASADENA:** Lois Boardman, Natalie Oginz, Richard Ross, Phyllis Thompson; **TEMPLE CITY:** Lynne Lang, Stella MacDonald

**Bolsa Chica, continued**

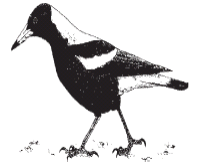
Egret landed on the railing and tied up foot traffic in both directions; this was still in the first 15 minutes of the trip!

Other water birds included several Horned Grebes, 7 Brant, and thirteen species of duck, including two Greater Scaup with the many Lessers. The larophiles among us enjoyed Glaucous-winged and Herring Gulls among the more common species. A variety of shorebirds were present, and often quite approachable: we found 2 Red Knots, several Dunlin, a few Long-billed Curlew, and others including Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, American Avocets, and Least and Western Sandpipers.

A great find for the trip was a Savannah Sparrow of the rare "Large-billed" subspecies that Tom Wurster picked out from the many "Belding's" Savannah Sparrows; the bird was very cooperative as it foraged on the side of the trail. All in all we had a great time in fine weather, and a total of 78 species for the trip.

*Mark and Janet Scheel*

**Magpie Bird Study Group**



The group meets the third

Tuesday of each month. We bird

9:00 am to about 11:30 am, have a sack lunch, and have a short business meeting. *All PAS members welcome!*

**Tuesday, March 16, 2010**

Santa Fe Dam  
Meet at the Nature Center

**Tuesday, April 20, 2010**

Rancho Santa Ana Gardens  
Meet in the parking lot

**Tuesday, May 18, 2010**

Lower Arroyo Seco  
Meet at the casting pond

**Donations to PAS**

Frank Burrows, Carl Byker, Denise Castillo, Rayma Harrison, Sue Horton, Antoinette McCreary, Wendy Raymond, Elena Seto, Lois Tandy, and an anonymous donor have recently made donations to our chapter. **Thank you!**

**Become a Chapter-only Member of PAS**

Local chapters of the National Audubon Society, such as Pasadena Audubon, receive only a small share of NAS membership dues. In order to finance our programs and services, including publication of The Wrentit, PAS offers Chapter-only memberships.

When it's time to renew your National Audubon membership, we invite you to instead become a Chapter-only Member of the Pasadena Audubon Society, or make a donation to our Chapter to support our programs. Chapter-only dues are \$20 per year or \$15 for seniors and students, all of which remains with our local chapter to fund our programs. We thank you all for your support!

**Chapter-only Membership Application**

Name ..... Phone .....  
Address .....  
City ..... State ..... ZIP .....  
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If this is a gift, please also provide donor's information below:

Name ..... Phone .....  
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Yearly dues:

- [ ] \$20 (regular) [ ] \$15 (senior, or full-time student)
- [ ] \$35 (T-shirt or Birding Guide, plus a PAS pin)
- [ ] \$\_\_\_\_\_ (donation)

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**John's Corner**

Along with PAS members Bev Mckenzie, Judy Bass, and Mary Jane Macy, I've been volunteering for Kimball Garrett at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, learning how to prepare bird specimens. While not always aromatic, preparing bird specimens has been fun and educational, both as a birder and on a general scientific level.

Before I started a little over a year ago, I was mostly ignorant as to how birds are preserved. In fact, there are several different methods, each with varying purposes. The first method that I learned is 'skeletonizing'. This involves plucking all

of a bird's feathers and skin, and removing as much tissue as practical. The bones are then placed in a jar with warm water. Microorganisms do most of the rest of the cleaning, and make skeletons particularly easy to create.

One of my favorite perks about volunteering at the museum is the regular opportunity to peruse the collections of study skins. Study skins, put simply, are bird skins with a cotton ball on a stick sewn up inside. Ideally, a single, linear cut is made down the underside, the skin is peeled back, and the legs, tail, and wings are separated from the main body. The wing bones remain attached to the study skin, because

unlike the rest of the feathers, the remiges are attached directly to the ulna. At the base of the head, the neck and main body are separated from the skull, from which the eyes, ears, and brain matter are also removed. The eye sockets are inflated with cotton balls, the skin is folded right-side out, and a carefully-crafted cotton wad on a stick is sewn inside the body. A more detailed account of how to prepare a bird study skin can be found in the Manual of Ornithology, by Noble Proctor and Patrick Lynch. There are several other methods, such as flat skins and pickling. Perhaps when I've learned how to do them, I can tell you more..

*John Garrett*

**New Members**

**ALHAMBRA:** Maria Aguas, Roberto Espinoza; **ALTADENA:** Alicia McLemore-Broder, Johnny Otis, Linda Senechal, Cameron & Bia Smith, Marta Stern, Leigh Ann Swanson; **ARCADIA:** Dan Bump, Joyce Camilleri, Ruth Reeder, Ben Sewell;

**AZUSA:** Allen Johnson, Lester Kau, Paul Kramer; **COVINA:** Becky Byerley; **DUARTE:** Susan Cross, Linda Veach; **LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE:** James & Carol Emerson, Eric Goldberg, Adrienne Griffin, Jenette Hill, Alex Holmes, Ogyoun Lim, Catherine Neva, Joan Pinchuk, Joyce Reibling, Gloria White; **MONROVIA:** Emiko Kuromiya, Virginia Owen, Denis &

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**...continued on page 9**