



THE WRENTIT

Founded 1904

Pasadena Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

Volume 69 — No. 4

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

April-May 2021

Birdathon Slated for Late April Here's What Every PAS Member Needs to Know

Spring is in the air, the birds are singing, and the Pasadena Audubon Society is restoring one of the grand traditions the pandemic deprived us of last year. Whether you've never heard of it or you're a seasoned veteran, the primer below can offer guidance to ensure we have a safe and lucrative event this year.

What exactly is Birdathon?

Birdathon is a fundraiser in which teams collect "per bird species" pledges from their friends, family or anyone who wants to sponsor them. Pledges can be as little as 5 cents a species or as big as the sponsor's bank account will allow. Teams choose a 24-hour window to go birding and find as many bird species as possible. Sponsors then make donations to PAS based on the number of species found by the team they sponsored. The team raising the most funds will be honored at the June meeting with a thunderous round of applause and a very birdy prize!

When exactly is Birdathon?

April 23rd, 24th, and 25th. We scheduled this event at the end of April for maximum avian diversity: Some wintering birds haven't left, some summer residents have arrived, and migrants abound. This year there is added incentive to get involved, as Birdathon also coincides with the America's Birdiest County/City competition, a friendly contest to see whose birders can tally the most species in their respective jurisdictions.



continued on page 5

President's Perch

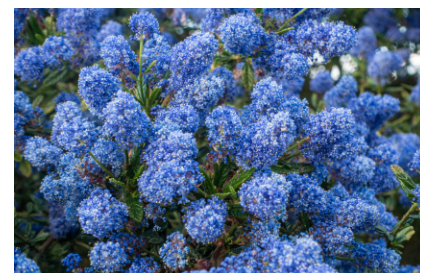
I love this time of year because my gorgeous 'Ray Hartman' Ceanothus is in magnificent full bloom. It's huge—maybe 15' x 15'—and the blooms are a stunningly luminescent periwinkle blue. The bees are in seventh heaven as they decorate the blossoms with their buzzing and pollinating, and the delicate aroma sweetens the air. But mostly, I love my Ceanothus because the leaves are full of holes. What's that, I hear you say? Why would I love such wanton vandalism? Why indeed! The answer is caterpillars.

That's right, caterpillars. I'm delighted to see my Ceanothus being eaten by many Very Hungry Caterpillars because that tells me that my garden is doing its job by providing food for breeding birds. And it's springtime! The birds are breeding, and boy, are they HUNGRY!

As I type this, I can hear the 'peep peep peep' of the baby Bewick's Wrens in the nest box right outside my office. The parents are busy feeding their babies—you guessed it—caterpillars. Last year, I had California Towhees, Dark-eyed

Juncos, House Finches, Northern Mockingbirds, and the wrens nest in my garden. They all fed their babies caterpillars, and a typical passerine nest requires as many as 5,000 caterpillars for the chicks to survive. That's a lot of caterpillars! Why caterpillars? Because they provide a delectable combination of fat, protein, nutrients, and water for the chicks.

So how to create a home for caterpillars? First, do not use insecticides. Our birds rely on insects to survive. Second, plant native plants that are hosts to moth and butterfly caterpillars. Some moths and butterflies will only lay their eggs on specific plants, and so if those plants are gone, the moths and butterflies are out of luck. And so are the birds.



Native shrubs like this California Lilac (Ceanothus) have Laura Solomon's garden abuzz with insects, and thus with birds, too

continued on page 2

MONTHLY CHAPTER MEETINGS: UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Hummingbirds: Small Wonders

April 21, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Sheri L. Williamson

They may be tiny, but hummingbirds know how to live large. Dazzling colors, fearless personalities, voracious appetites, continent-spanning migrations, "singing" feathers, and sometimes scandalous personal lives are just a few of the qualities that have earned these miniature marvels a devoted following far beyond the birding community. Join internationally known hummingbird researcher Sheri Williamson for an evening with these small wonders. As adaptable as they are, hummingbirds are vulnerable to many of the same environmental crises as other migratory birds — loss of habitat and food resources, pollution, and the effects of climate change. Good news: Almost anyone in North America can help build a brighter future for hummingbirds with a few simple actions.

Williamson, a lifelong naturalist, birder and conservationist, is co-founder and director/naturalist of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory. She recently

completed a major revision of A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America in the Peterson Field Guide Series, first published in 2002, and she will provide a sneak peek at this revised edition.

Southern California Native Plants for the Bird Garden

May 19th, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Parker Davis

Got birds? There are about 600 species of birds that call California home. Here in Pasadena, we have fabulous local, native birds, such as the California Towhee, California Quail and California Thrasher. You can find these birds by traveling to a local open space, preserve, or park, but why not just bring your favorite birds to you by planting a few beautiful native plants in your yard? In this presentation, you will learn about some of the best native plants for birds, the relationships that the birds have formed with them, and why they're so important. We'll also go over a few different plant combinations that are not only great for a variety of species of birds, but also beautiful to look at and easy to care for.

Parker Davis is the Director of Hahamongna Native Plant Nursery, a project of the Arroyo Seco Foundation. A Pasadena local and the son of a former biology teacher, Parker spent much of his childhood exploring the canyons and crests of the San Gabriel Mountains. His fascination with its local flora and fauna has been a driving obsession in his life. He was formerly a volunteer at Los Nogales Native Plant Nursery in Debs Park, where, with the support of the Audubon Society, he documented over 200 species of plants, animals, & fungi and compiled them into a digital biome. He began leading interpretive walks and giving talks on natural history over 4 years ago. He also offers independent consultations and design services for gardens with native plants for homes and businesses.

Monthly chapter meetings are held the third Wednesday of the month. Until further notice, the meetings will be held remotely via the Zoom platform for video conferencing. The application can be downloaded free of charge to computer or smartphone at <https://zoom.us/download>. Chapter members will receive an email from PAS with a link on the day of the meeting.

June Dinner

June 16, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Format TBD. Most likely this will be our last precautionary virtual meeting, but whether it's in person or not, the highlight of the event will be the members' slideshow, so be sure to have yours ready to share!

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

The PAS Board meets from 7:00 pm-8:30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month, between September and June. Contact Lois Brunet at lbrunet@pasadenaaudubon.org if you would like the Zoom link to attend.

April 7th, 2021
May 5th, 2021
June 2nd, 2021
September 1st, 2021
October 6th, 2021
November 3rd, 2021
December 1st, 2021

PRESIDENT'S PERCH, CONT'D

How do I know which plants are best to host moths and butterflies? I started with a video that Prof. Doug Tallamy gave to the California Native Plant Society called "Restoring Nature's Relationships." Pasadena Audubon shared it with you a couple of years ago. You can find it on YouTube, and it's well-worth the hour of your time. At the end of the video, he provides a list of the top ten California plants for hosting moths and butterfly caterpillars, and oak and ceanothus were near the top. Willow was at the very top, but I don't live in a riparian zone, so I'm planting Ceanothus and oak instead.

Another excellent resource is Calscape.org. This wonderful gift from the California Native Plant Society tells what plants are native to your area, and it tells you how many species of moths and butterflies a plant might host. For example, I searched my favorite oak on the website, the Engelmann, and discovered that it can host 111 species of moths and butterflies. How cool is that? That's 111 reasons I now have four Engelmann Oak trees.

We are Pasadena Audubon, and we are planting for the birds!

Laura Solomon



PAGE THREE BIRD

Wrentits

Three-hundred and fifty yards from my house there is a trailhead that descends into one of my favorite places in the world. Eaton Canyon lies at the foot of the San Gabriel mountains, located on a northeast edge of Los Angeles, and it is not just my local canyon and my favorite birding patch, it is also my childhood canyon. It is a place full of memories and magic. Since March of 2020, however, I have been unable to enjoy the simple pleasure of grabbing my binoculars and walking out the door to head down to check on the chaparral birds there, despite my being thoroughly grounded here due to the pandemic. The canyon is so close, but remains mostly closed today, accessible only through a limited and complex reservation system. One is now required to drive to its farther entrance, go through security, and stay only three hours.

Three-hundred and fifty yards is only slightly less than the territorial range of one of North America's most unique birds, the Wrentit. The only representative in the New World of an Old World radiation, the Wrentit is currently believed to be most closely related to the parrotbills of Asia, though old world warblers and Asiatic babblers have previously been considered. Nothing is close to it here though. It is a strange little bird. With a lifelong home territory of about .62 hectares (that's about 1.5 acres), and juveniles leaving home to settle a whopping 400m on average from their natal grounds, they were once described as the most sedentary bird species in North America. I can relate.

Though my house is within territorial striking distance, and though my property hosts some pretty nifty chaparral bird species, I will never see a Wrentit in my yard. They need what is in the canyon, not what grows in established pseudo-feral suburban gardens, even ones like ours where we are working to establish native plants. One of their favorite tangles to reside in, and whose fleshy drupes sustain them through winter when there are fewer fruits, insects, and spiders to glean, is poison oak. Maybe someday. This year, I can hear them as I walk my dog near the canyon in the afternoons, but I never see them. Their simple bouncing ball of a song has many practical uses in their lives, and has very few variations, but it is certainly loud. Both sexes sing. It is the first bird song I learned as a child.

Last week I scored a reservation to hike in the canyon. It's not quite time yet for Wrentits to breed, but they sing year long, stay monogamous (even roosting together in little family fluff mounds), and can be in the same general territory for up to 12 years. I'm sure the average is much lower than that, but still. It has only been a little over a year since I last saw them there. I headed straight to where I had last seen them, at the edge of the wash, and was startled by a loud song almost immediately. There really aren't the hordes of people in the canyon any more to inure them to us, and I had provoked one into giving a territorial proclamation. As I slowly turned around I saw two of them looking at me from the edge of a large toyon, with their characteristic fierce gaze (they have disconcertingly white irises, ringed with a blood maroon outer iris). The same presumed pair I had seen over a year ago, they were no longer concerned with me, and dropped into a very mature poison oak patch, skulking and gobbling up seeds as they went along, exactly as they are supposed to.



"Wrentit" © 2021 Catherine Hamilton

Catherine Hamilton

BIRD SCIENCE PROGRAM AND SCHOOLYARD GARDEN UPDATES

A Time of Growth

This month, the Young Birders discussed migration in the Kids group. Why do birds migrate and how did humans first understand the phenomenon? We looked at Abundance Animations for two of our non-resident birds, the Ruby Crowned Kinglet and the Bullock’s Oriole. These maps provide a wonderful illustration of birds on the move and can be found here: ebird.org/science/status-and-trends. Are there any kinglets in Pasadena on your birthday?!

We also distributed a Spring Migrants of the month flyer and challenged our fledglings to see as many of these arrivals as they can. You can download a copy from our website, pasadenaaudubon.org/youngbirders.

Meanwhile, teenagers and college students have been treated to a couple of excellent lectures by college sophomore, Teodelina Martelli! In February, Valentine’s Day oblige, Teodelina talked about bird courtship and how sexual selection acts as driving force in avian speciation. This past month, she took on avian anatomy and physiology with an overview of all the major biological systems. Curious? You’re in luck. These lectures are posted on our website.

YBC Kids meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. YBC Teens meets on the 2nd Thursday. Sign-up on our website: pasadenaaudubon.org/youngbirders

Our native habitat garden at Washington Elementary is thriving. We’ve created a brochure for the school community



This handsome spring migrants scorecard was sent to the Fledglings group of Young Birders to help them identify some of the birds showing up in the San Gabriel Valley in March

in English and Spanish, soon to be downloadable from our website.

Spring flowers are popping up everywhere: Poppies, lupines, hummingbird sage, and pitcher sage; Baby Blue Eyes and bladderpods. The bird list is growing too, thanks to the vigilant eye of gardener Darren Dowell. We’re up to 51! We also have two new nest boxes in place, thanks to Graham Hamby; the predicted tenants are Bewick’s Wrens, but Mountain Chickadees and White-breasted Nuthatches are also in the area.

If you’d like to join the volunteer crew, or just come out for a visit, email Lois at LoisB.PAS@gmail.com.

Lois Brunet

AVIAN WORLD NEWS

Crow Suspected in String of Burglaries

NOUMEA- It started last Wednesday with a phone call to the police from perplexed homeowner Jacinda Burgdorf. She reported that the lock on her back door had been expertly picked by an intruder who apparently absconded with nothing but a bag of cashews from her pantry. The next day her neighbor Cyrus Lindscomb noticed the entire supply of beef heart he normally doles out to his pet cichlids had been devoured while he slept. Since then, three more homes in the trendy Portes de Fer neighborhood have fallen victim to the peckish prowler, who has made a midnight snack of everything from crème fraîche to Fritos®.

Based on evidence found at the crime scenes, investigators now believe the responsible party is a New Caledonian Crow. A tell-tale feather in the Burgdorf residence provided the first clue. Laboratory analysis has since detected urates, an excretory product of birds, in droppings sampled from all five scenes. Most crucially, a makeshift bump key skillfully fashioned from a twig was left behind at the entrance in the latest caper. It all points to a clever corvid culprit.

Because they may have knowledge of the habits or even the identity of the bird, animal behaviorists from Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of Auckland are persons of interest in the investigation. Lead detective Jacques DePoisson told reporters, "Well, the



New Caledonia Gendarmerie Spokeswoman Marion LeBoeuf briefing reporters on the crime spree at a recent press conference, at which time police released a composite sketch of the putative perpetrator

professors have basically taught these birds the art of breaking and entering, haven't they? Yes, the crows in this country are very astute, we get it. There is no need for academics to keep turning them into master thieves with their silly research projects."

The suspect remains at large and is considered winged and ingenious.

CHAPTER ANNOUNCEMENTS

PAS Board Adds Development Chair

At its March meeting, the PAS Board voted unanimously to appoint Sok Tng as the new Development Chair. She brings a wealth of professional experience to the position and, as a referral from non-profit consulting firm Jericho Road, she braved multiple interviews and is surely among the most thoroughly vetted board members in the chapter's long history!

Sok Tng currently works at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County as a prospect researcher. She started birding in high school back in Singapore where she is originally from. After her non-birding boys came along, she took a long hiatus from the hobby and has been re-acquainting herself with birds, birders and birding in recent years. Working from home has definitely rekindled her interest in birding, and she attributes her sanity this past year to the multitudes of birds and their singing outside her home office! Sok has a background in wildlife biology, applied ecology and conservation biology. In Singapore she worked as a zookeeper, an animal nurse, and in the regulation of the trade in endangered species of wild flora and fauna.



Newly-appointed Development Chair Sok Tng prepares to take a gander at the waterfowl on a recent visit to Peck Road Water Conservation Park

Advocacy Committee Now Has Co-Chairs

Filling leadership positions for the Advocacy Committee was also on the agenda at the last PAS board meeting. Fortunately, two terrific volunteers have stepped into the breach created when Taylor Paez assumed the role of Treasurer. Without further ado, here they are!

Katie Porter has been a Pasadena Audubon member since 2017 and has been on the Advocacy Committee since 2019. Compared to many PAS members, she's a new birder, but compared to people picking up birding due to Covid she's been at this a long time (perspective is everything). She is an affordable housing professional and in her free time she can be found hiking, camping, bike riding, and reading. Usually not all at the same time. Having lived in the Pacific Northwest for over a decade, she is in many ways a northwesterner at heart, but has grown to love and appreciate Southern California.



Katie Porter and her camera-shy canine companion out for a stroll in the foothills

Ashwin Sivakumar is a high school junior from Pasadena who loves all things nature-related, especially birding. Ashwin works on ecological research concerning bird migration, endangered species conservation, and climate change. As a founder of the GoNative! initiative, Ashwin promotes native plant use in urban landscapes, a cause he has also spearheaded on the Advocacy Committee. When he isn't watching birds or studying them, Ashwin enjoys writing, gardening with native plants, and fencing.



Ashwin Sivakumar, bins at the ready, hiking Throop Peak

The Pasadena Audubon Society Advocacy Committee strives to promote awareness of and find solutions to the threats faced by birds and their habitats in our communities through multiple initiatives. Our "bird-friendly street trees initiative" recommends street trees to our local government that would provide food, shelter, and nesting habitat for our native and migrant birds. The Committee is also working to change the City's tree-trimming schedule and practices in order to protect nesting birds in the urban forest. In addition, we routinely review and collect signatures for petitions to our local, state, and federal representatives to enact bird-friendly legislation.

To join our committee and lend your voice in support of our feathery friends, please contact Katie and Ashwin at tkatiepo@gmail.com and ahs_oregon@yahoo.com.

BIRDATHON 2021, CONT'D

How can I participate?

There are two ways. You can:

- Form a team. For team registrations email birdathon@pasadenaaudubon.org, and download pledge sheets from our website. Collect pledges and make a birding plan. You might want to bird at a single park, or stay within Pasadena city limits; some travel only by foot or bicycle, some count only birds that they photograph. A team can spend as little or as much of the day as they want, from watching backyard feeders for an hour to embarking on a 24-hour-long manic quest on a finely-tuned precision birding route.

- Join a team. This option is restricted this year by— what else?— the pandemic. The Big Sit can add two households and Team Safer-at-home has, as the name implies, no limitation.

I can't form or join a team that weekend, but I want to contribute. How do I pledge?

Pick a team, and email your "per bird species pledge" and contact information to the leader. They'll be happy to hear from you! After the event, they'll be in touch with their results, and you can make your donation by check or on our website.

Birdathon Tips

Sponsors can be anyone: friends, family, co-workers, even your boss. In addition to supporting PAS, sponsors learn about birds and bird habitat. Sponsors who are not birders are often amazed at the number of bird species that can be found here. It's a good idea to give your sponsors an estimate of how many birds you expect to find before they pledge! After Birdathon, send a thank-you note, a species list, and a description of how the day went, including any surprises or amusing anecdotes. Birdathon is a lot of fun, supports PAS, and educates non-birders about birds and the importance of habitat. So join a team or sponsor one!

How does PAS use the funds?

Birdathon helps fund many of our exciting programs, including the Bird Science Program in our public elementary schools; grants and scholarships that support important research and send young birders to camps and conferences; conservation initiatives, such as our Peck cleanups, and advocacy for a more bird-friendly Pasadena.

What about the damnable pandemic? Can we have teams birding together in close proximity?

Once again Covid is the issue that looms over every social event. The pandemic picture is definitely trending in the right direction, but PAS will abide by the local health orders in place on the days of the event. At press time, this still means social distancing is in effect, and outdoor gatherings are limited to three households for a maximum duration of two hours regardless of the households' vaccination status. (There are no time limits for single households). Circumstances may change between now and then, so we encourage those wanting to join an existing team to keep abreast of current health orders and to follow updates from our pasadenaaudubon@groups.io email service and our website.

Birdathon Teams as of Wrentit Presstime

Team Safer-at-home

Any PAS member living in L.A. County is welcome to join, by birding in our safer-at-home spaces. With many participants, this will also be an interesting citizen science project studying how migratory birds use residential areas. Email Darren by April 21 to join: dowell.darren@yahoo.com

The Big Sit: Mark Hunter at Legg Lake

Specifics will depend on county rules at the time. Email Mark to join: mark.hunter@pasadenaaudubon.org

Inglorious Bustards

Wrentit Editor Carl Matthies and family will harness the power of ebird to plot out a big day of birding at the hottest hot spots in LA County from the foothills to the sea. Unfortunately, unless health orders are further relaxed, these bustards won't be able to add anyone to our team because of the time restriction. In case things improve, or if you'd like to donate, email is cfmatthies@yahoo.com.

Interested in Joining the Bird Science Program?

Docent Training returns in September!

The Bird Science Program introduces schoolchildren to the wonders of birds through classroom lessons and a half day field trip. Kids use loaner binoculars to observe the birds in their habitat at Peck Park. They interact with live educational owls and participate in nature-based games. We are looking for enthusiastic educators to assist both in the classroom and at field trips. Extensive bird knowledge is not required, but enthusiasm for nature and conservation is a plus.

Save the Dates: Thursday mornings from September 9th through October 10th
Cost: \$35

Sign-ups will open in April. Stay Tuned! Info will be relayed on social media, the PAS website, and through eblasts.



Become a part of the Bird Science Program Docent Team, and you too will get to meet Odie the Educational Western Screech Owl, or one of his kin
© Kathy Degner

GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT

Thank you to our Wonderful Donors!

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DAWN CHORUS (Monthly Donors): Lois & Pascal Brunet, Hannah Carbone, Kathy Degner, Jared Knickmeyer & Lynda Elkin, John R. Merriam, Taylor Paez, Laura & Gavin Solomon, Patrick Walling

MEMORIAL & TRIBUTE GIFTS: Gifts were received in memory of our beloved member and volunteer, Wendy Gordon, from Elizabeth Downing and Barbara Lester.

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 pasadenaudubon.org/donate. Dawn Chorus donors receive a beautiful enamel pin designed by PAS' own Patrick Walling and Graham Hamby!

PAS Board Seeks Treasurer Candidates

Are you looking for ways to become more involved with an historic organization committed to sharing a passion and commitment to birds in our area?

The Pasadena Audubon Society, whose mission is to share the joys of birds through birding, education and the conservation of bird habitat, is currently seeking candidates for Treasurer on the Board of Directors to help further our mission and shape the future of the organization.

A background with business, finance, or accounting would be helpful. We are committed to broadening our engagement across the community and diversifying our leadership. All are encouraged to participate.

If you'd like to bring your ideas, perspective, and experience to a small, community-based, environmental non-profit, this may be just the opportunity you've been looking for! For more information, please contact us at pasadenaudubon@gmail.com.



A Dark-eyed Junco using a sunflower seed to do its best Edward G. Robinson impersonation © Jason Dullack



"You woke me up at four in the afternoon just to tell me that?" A sleepy Great-horned Owl perches in a Silk Floss Tree at the Arboretum © Learden Matthies



A Zone-tailed Hawk is once again in the Grand Avenue Park vicinity of Monrovia. It's no wonder their prey mistake them for Turkey Vultures! © Karen Suarez

Pasadena Audubon Society Board

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Join the Pasadena the Audubon Society

PAS Chapter-only Membership supports our conservation, education and outreach efforts. You'll be the first to hear about our programs and field trips, and you'll receive a oneyear subscription to *The Wrentit* newsletter.

Membership dues: \$25 for individuals, \$30 for families, \$15 for seniors/senior family/students. Lifetime membership with a \$2,000 donation. You can join online at pasadenaaudubon.org or by submitting this form. Your contact information is never shared.

Make checks payable to PAS at 1750 N. Altadena Dr., Pasadena CA 91107

Name _____

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I want to go paperless and read *The Wrentit* online

If you'd like to purchase a gift membership, please contact our membership chair, Graham Hamby, at graham.hamby@gmail.com