

the wrentit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 73 · NO. 3 | FEBRUARY-MARCH 2025



Young Birders Club at Eaton Canyon, December 2024. © Sean Doorly

EATON CANYON SPECIAL By Fernanda Ezabella, Editor

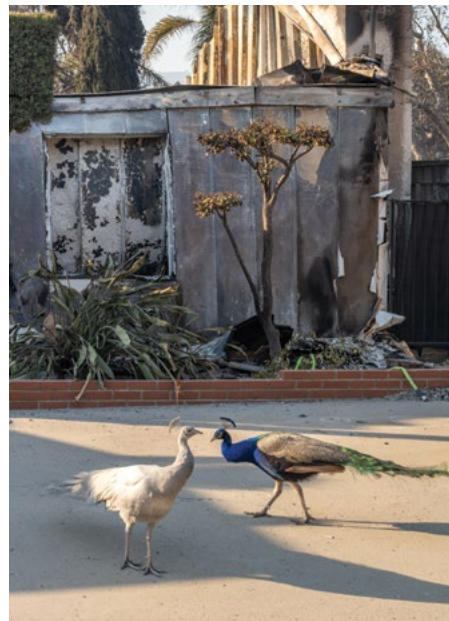
In ancient cultures, the mythical Phoenix is embodied by a colorful bird, variously depicted as an eagle, a heron, or a pheasant. It sets fire to its own nest, only to rise from the ashes, bringing a message of renewal, rebirth, and immortality.

When Eaton Canyon Natural Area burned through all its acres in January's fires, no Phoenix emerged from the flames. Yet majestic peafowl roamed the scorched streets of Altadena, as captured by photographer Kevin Cooley. The outpouring of volunteers rallying to plan its restoration and helping the community was itself a powerful symbol of resilience and hope.

Eaton Canyon has long been home to the Pasadena Audubon Society. Our last event of 2024 was a festive dinner at the park's Nature Center, now destroyed. And just three days before the fires, dozens of PAS members gathered for our monthly bird walk through its canyons.

This issue of *The Wrentit* is a tribute to the park so deeply cherished by our members and vital to the surrounding communities. Photographer Sean Doorly registered the

moments from that final supper, while PAS president Luke Tiller joined that last bird walk, a bilingual event where we learned what Mexicans call the Northern Mockingbird.



Peafowl in Altadena after fires. © Kevin Cooley (IG: @kevincooley_)

Our Board member Helin Jung spoke with the Los Angeles County biologist based at Eaton Canyon and shares a compelling report on the signs of life among the coastal sage scrub and chaparral burned to the ground. She also delves into the story of the "guardians" of the park's native seed vault, recounting its creation and the frantic efforts to save it from the fires.

Photographer Tom Mills, a familiar name on these pages, returns to reflect on his decades of service as a docent and volunteer at Eaton. Meanwhile, reporter Alicia Di Rado makes her debut here with interviews with the Moore Laboratory of Zoology director and a UCLA ecologist on the impact of the fires on our feathered friends and their migration.

There are also our usual Chapter News and the columns *Young Birders Club* and *Conservation & Advocacy*, and much more. For those eager to help, there are two articles on citizen science programs you can join today, such as Project Phoenix, which studies the effects of smoke on birds and provides opportunities to make a difference.

We hope these stories honor the spirit of the canyons and the community.

Monthly Chapter Meetings

Zoom link at: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings>

► WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19 7:00-8:30pm, Online

After the Fires with Eric Strauss

With the aftermath of the January fires still with us, we are going to examine the impact of fire—and the almost constant threat of fire—on our region. Our speaker is Eric Strauss, the executive director of the Center for Urban Resilience (CUREs) at Loyola Marymount College. Strauss is an expert in urban ecology and studies ways humans and nature can better coexist.

► WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19 7:00-8:30pm, Online

Hawai'i—The Extinction Capital of the World with David and Tammy McQuade

Pasadena Audubon's favorite husband-and-wife Big Year team, Tammy and David McQuade, return to show us the amazing—and often endangered—birds of the Hawaiian Islands.



Free Bird Walks

Check dates, places, and make reservations at:

www.pasadenaudubon.org/fieldtrips

Let birding be your escape in these challenging times. As February turns to March, most of the winter visitor birds remain, and we'll see the first signs of the renewal of spring in the form of arriving swallows. Join us as we visit some of our favorite area sites such as Bonelli Park and Bette Davis Picnic Area and check up on our local birds.

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

Social

► FEBRUARY 26, MARCH 26 5:00-8:00pm

Birds & Beers @ Wild Parrot Brewing Co.

2302 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena

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

Interested in Volunteering with PAS?

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



Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► FEBRUARY 11, MARCH 11 7:00-8:30pm

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

'iwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*)
© USFWS - Pacific Region

chapter news

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Jared Nigro

Pasadena Audubon Society had a wonderfully busy year end. In December, our membership voted at the Monthly Meeting to accept all proposed bylaws changes from the Board of Directors. You can find the bylaws in the previous issue of *The WrenTit*.

We also had a fun and active Christmas Bird Count on December 14th. It was a very productive day that ended in a lovely dinner at Eaton Canyon Nature Center. While I mourn the loss of ECNC, I am simultaneously grateful that our last event in that space was so special.

Lastly, I personally want to thank all of our very generous members for donating to our Annual Appeal this season. PAS received approximately \$39,000 in donations, making it one of the most successful appeals in our 121 year history!

As always, PAS would not be thriving if it weren't for you all. Thank you for your love, care, and vigor. It will see us through to brighter days.

It's PAS Grants Season!

Seeing where pelicans go after they leave the nest. Counting parrots using drone-mounted thermal cameras. Collecting pollen grains stuck on warblers to learn where they've been. These are just a few of the research projects Pasadena Audubon Society has funded through its scientific grants program. PAS offers grants to scientists and science students to cover research equipment, conference registrations, publication, analysis, and more.

The latest application period is about to start (in fact, it may have started by the time you read this). If you, or someone you know, have a science, research, or educational proposal related to birds or the environment in Southern California, we would love for you to apply! Get all the information on our website (www.pasadenaudubon.org/grants).

HOPE RISES FROM THE ASHES

PAS volunteer and Eaton Canyon docent shares his decades-long experience at the park **By Tom Mills**

For decades, I have been one of many volunteer docents at the Eaton Canyon Natural Area and part of what we call the Museum Committee. When the Eaton Fire struck so suddenly and destroyed our Nature Center, it was a real gut-punch to have all our efforts erased so quickly, so violently.

The Museum Committee is made of volunteers who lovingly devote a huge amount of their free time to the design and maintenance of numerous displays. Since after the Covid shutdown, we had been working to upgrade the exhibits in the museum. Other volunteers had been designing and overseeing the construction of the Nature Center's store, where books, maps, and hand-crafted items (many by the docents themselves) were sold. Both the museum and store were looking fantastic, and we were actively engaged in making additional upgrades when the Eaton Fire struck so suddenly.

Some volunteers have spent years documenting the flora of Eaton Canyon by carefully curating collections of dried and pressed leaves and flowers. Other groups spent enormous amounts of time removing invasive plant species, propagating and planting native species, and amassing native seed collections (more on the seeds on page 5).

When the Nature Center was rebuilt after the 1993 fire, I assisted with the live animal exhibit, primarily reptiles and amphibians. I secured cages and made faux rock-wall backgrounds for them.

In 2003, I upgraded the reptile exhibits. Unfortunately, the fire struck when the park was closed. Some of the staff attempted to return to save the animals, but the fire was too fast.

Sadly, of the snakes on display had been a female Rosy Boa I had donated to the Nature Center back in 1998 or so. She had been one of the offspring I produced as part of a captive breeding project. She was nearing 30 years old at the time she perished along with the other animals on display. Thankfully, the Desert Tortoises were spared as they had been over-wintering at one of the docents' homes.

It's a sad time for our Pasadena and Altadena communities. Too many people lost their lives and their homes. In fact, many volunteers were local residents who lost everything. Some, like me and my wife, Simone, were spared that anguish. Unlike the wild areas of Eaton Canyon, many of the emotional scars left by this catastrophic event may never heal. As we have seen before, however, our natural areas are resilient. After a bit of rest and rejuvenation, Eaton Canyon will heal, and we will rebuild.

Tom Mills is a prolific wildlife photographer and selected over 300 photos of commonly seen birds at Eaton Canyon: tinyurl.com/TomEatonPhotos

As a longtime member of Pasadena Audubon, he volunteers as a leader in our monthly bird walks at Eaton Canyon. Read more about Tom's journey in the profile by Sean Doorly in the previous issue of *The Wrentit*.



Yellow-rumped Warbler © Tom Mills



Allen's Hummingbird © Tom Mills



Wrentit © Tom Mills

SIGNS OF LIFE AMID DESTRUCTION

LA County biologist reflects on the path to renewal after devastating fire by Helin Jung

At 5:30 p.m. on January 7, the staff at Eaton Canyon Nature Center finished work. It had not been an ordinary day.

The heavy winds were such a concern that the park was closed to the public for safety, according to Cristhian Mace, the natural areas biologist for Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation.

Branches broke off from trees and portable toilets fell over. The Palisades Fire had started burning that morning, but for Mace the feeling was more of disbelief: Eaton Canyon did not seem to have been affected by the windstorm forecast as “life-threatening” by the National Weather Service.

The park staff locked up and went home, unaware that 45 minutes later a fire of historic magnitude would begin tearing through the area. When they returned later that evening, attempting to rescue live animals and other items from the Nature Center, the county sheriff barred them at the gate.

The next morning, with the fire having burned through, staff were allowed on the scene. They found that everything housed at the Nature Center—from the taxidermy black bears in the museum, to the reference books in the library, to field gear and educational outreach materials—had been destroyed.

The structure itself, completed five years after the 1993 Kinneloa Fire, had been constructed with fire-resistant walls and fire doors. Despite these measures, the building’s roof collapsed. The walls and doors sustained severe damage. The ruins will have to be bulldozed, according to Mace, another nature center built anew.

The Eaton Fire had burned over 14,000 acres, including all 190 acres of Eaton Canyon Natural Area and the additional 82 acres of open space to the north of the park.

The county has not yet announced a recovery plan or a reopening date for the park. Mace would prefer it remains closed for the rest of the year to give nature a chance to recover without obstruction. The soil remains fragile, coated with potentially toxic ash, and compressing it with foot traffic would be an added setback.

Given the public interest in restoration—the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates collected 1,100 names of interested volunteers

within the first week—encouraging patience would be a priority.

“This space has suffered an injury, and as with any injury, it needs time to recover,” Mace says. “We can be there to apply a balm, but this is an opportunity for us to step back and let nature dictate what kind of help it needs.”

The Oaks That Endured the Flames

A brief early survey suggests that not every habitat will be starting over completely.

Mace reports that while the coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and alluvial plant communities had effectively burned to the ground, most of the coast live oak trees and Western sycamores had survived.

“I used to sit at a window staring out at two gorgeous oak trees, their canopy stretched over the Nature Center,” Mace says. “Those trees stood next to a burning building and survived.”

The sycamores still have leaves on their branches, which meant they had hung on through gusts and flames. Most of the mature oaks have now endured two major fires in their lifetimes and have another burn scar to show for it—a fresh badge of honor.”

“The resiliency of the oak woodland is an opportunity to examine our own resilience,” Mace says.

Eventually, the trees will drop their leaves and begin another cycle of growth. Following the next rain, there will be sprouts emerging across the canyon, whether from roots or seeds that have been waiting to germinate.

“I’m very optimistic about the regrowth coming out of Eaton Canyon,” Mace says.

“In the past 30 years, there was a beautiful recovery of all the vegetation types. I can’t wait to be a little old lady covered with gray hair, walking back into the canyon saying, ‘Sweet, full recovery. Good to see it.’”

That first morning back, Mace was still in a state of shock while taking in the rubble. But from high overhead, a Red-tailed Hawk cried out, stopping her in her tracks. The bird took her out of the devastation and brought her back into the wider world. She looked around her and saw Spotted Towhees and White-crowned Sparrows. California Quail scuttled across the charred ground.

“Nature reminds me of how small I am,” Mace says. “It’s a grounding, humbling experience.”



While the Eaton Canyon Nature Center was irretrievably damaged by fire, mature coast live oak and Western sycamore trees around the building remain intact.



Photos © Christian Mace

THE GUARDIANS OF THE NATIVE SEEDS

How Nina Raj and Max Yasuda created a seed vault for the park, and then rushed to save it from the fires by Helin Jung

A mulefat seed sits at the bottom of a wisp of fringe that looks like the world's most delicate scalp massager, or a paintbrush for a hummingbird. Botanically, the fringe is a pappus, and the seed an achene punctuating a parachute that carries it off in the wind.

To collect the seeds of *Baccharis salicifolia*, you must wait until the plant is ready to let go of its embryos. Time it right and you will be able to separate the pappi from the mulefat's flowers with hardly a touch.

Mulefat is a tall shrub with leaves like a willow. Its straight, sturdy stems provide ideal nesting habitat for the Least Bell's Vireo. It grows abundantly at Eaton Canyon, where the California Native Plant Society's San Gabriel Mountains chapter hosted a seed workshop last fall.

Leading the workshop was Nina Raj, a docent naturalist and founder of Altadena Seed Library. Raj, along with Max Yasuda, the conservation chair at Eaton Canyon, had recently embarked on a project to put more native plants in areas that were overrun with invasive species. They also wanted to create a seed vault that could be accessed after "a major climatic event or wildfire," Raj says.

Starting last spring, they mapped the vegetation of the park for the first time in 25 years. Working



Clockwise from top left: Mulefat, Laurel Sumac, Narrow leaf Milkweed, Miner's Lettuce, Yucca, and California Buckwheat with California Sagebrush.

alongside biologist Cristhian Mace, they identified stands that were deemed degraded and calculated the number of seeds needed to restore them, before collecting the corresponding seeds from the canyon itself.

Since June, Yasuda had gathered seeds from 100 hyperlocal plant species, housing them in a makeshift nursery next to Eaton Canyon's overflow parking lot. Aware that a metal shed would not be a safe storage facility, yet unwilling to use the park's Nature Center given it had burned before, Yasuda had actively been working on a more viable solution.

At the workshop, Raj demonstrated how to gather seeds from several plants, among them mulefat, black sage, scarlet monkeyflower, and California buckwheat. Volunteers put seeds into paper lunch bags. At subsequent workshops, some of those seeds were processed and put into soil.

Escaping Altadena

Raj brought the paper bags, vials, and starter trays full of seeds to her greenhouse at home in Altadena. Then came January 7. When the winds blew the roof panels off her greenhouse, Raj nailed its door shut.

As fire raced down the canyon, she pried the greenhouse door back open with a crowbar,

grabbed the bags and vials of seeds, and threw them into the backseat of her car before realizing she might need some clothes too.

Yasuda, also an Altadenan, packed his hatchback with supplies for his 10-month-old daughter. He looked at the acorns that had germinated after a cold stratification in his refrigerator—from Eaton Canyon's coast live oaks, Engelmann oaks, and San Gabriel oaks. He thought, "They'll be fine. I'll be back."

At that point, Yasuda knew the fire had reached the park and probably the nursery. Instead of despair, he felt relief: the acorns were safe, he would use them for reforestation.

Indeed, all the plants and seeds stored in the nursery were lost. But Yasuda's home, together with the acorns, were also completely destroyed. He and his family will most likely have to relocate a good distance away from Altadena.

Raj's house remains, as do the seeds, which she has been too afraid to take out of the car. The seedlings from those workshops are still growing in the greenhouse. When the time is right and the landscape is ready, there will be a place for those plants and seeds to go.

"Seeds are very hopeful," Raj says. "They're an insurance policy. Seeds do so much for us when all of our hearts are hurting for what's been lost."

Eaton Canyon History

Back in the 1990s, the park suffered another fire that destroyed its Nature Center and all Pasadena Audubon Society records dating back to 1904.

"What we are seeing right now is what we have termed the fire of the future."

—Karen Terrill, a spokesperson for the State Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, quoted in the *New York Times* in 1993

When Eaton Canyon Last Burned: The Kinneloa Fire Began: October 27, 1993

Source: Campfire near Mount Wilson Toll Road

Wind Speeds: 40 to 50 miles per hour

Burned Area: 5,485 acres

Destroyed Structures: 196, including Eaton Canyon Nature Center built in 1963

Lost items included: Pasadena Audubon Society records dating back to 1904

Building a (Then) New Nature Center

Size: 7,653 square feet

Cost: \$2,453,376 (\$235.20 of which came from the proceeds of a bake sale organized by a class of second graders)

Groundbreaking: July 1997

Dedication: November 1998

WHAT WILDFIRES MEAN FOR OUR BIRDS

UCLA and Occidental scientists talk about impacts and resilience

by Alicia Di Rado

The birds of our Southern California mountains thrive in tough chaparral that relies on wildfire for renewal. But fire can go awry.

Just as residents of Altadena and Pacific Palisades fled home due to the blazes, so did birds. For both humans and animals, fire's effects may prove acute and long-lasting.

"Fires have shaped the ecosystems that we know and love in California for millennia, and there are also wildlife, including birds, that are adapted to fire-prone ecosystems and depend on resources that are created and sustained by fire," said ecologist Olivia Sanderfoot, a postdoctoral researcher in the lab of UCLA Professor Morgan Tingley.

Sanderfoot studies interactions between wildfire smoke and birds (more about her in Project Phoenix on the next page). She notes that the fires we see today, both in California and all over the world, are different than decades ago. "They are more intense and happen more often. They move more quickly, cause more destruction and more smoke pollution," she said.

Yet scientists know surprisingly little about how they affect animals such as birds.

Sanderfoot notes that birds are particularly vulnerable to smoke because of their efficient respiratory systems. They easily absorb oxygen from the air to power flight, but they absorb pollutants easily, too.

No one understands exactly how pollutants cause trouble in birds, but scientists believe that smoke particles spur inflammation. Consider how asthma sufferers struggle to breathe on smoggy days. So do birds.

"Animals can't turn on air purifiers and take cover like humans do," Sanderfoot said. So how will birds respond to smoke from recent fires?

Sanderfoot participated in a 2024 study that offers hints. It found that birds exposed to acute smoke in the Bay Area were less likely to be captured in mist nets, either because they reduced their activity or temporarily relocated. She suspects that birds may hunker down and eat less during smoke events, either because they do not feel well or because they intuitively reduce their activity to lessen their exposure.

She and Tingley are now exploring impacts on breeding success. She expects their work will show that smoke reduces birds' reproductivity. Meanwhile, other researchers have shown that Tule Geese migrating from Alaska to California's Central Valley through intense wildfire smoke in 2020 diverted from their usual flight paths and took twice as long to arrive at their Oregon stopover site.

Good Habitat Remains

In our mountains, fire-spurred habitat loss might harm birds less than many fear.

Ornithologist John McCormack, director and curator of the Moore Laboratory of Zoology at Occidental College, estimates that recent fires burned about 17 percent of the Santa Monica Mountains and 2 percent of the San Gabriel Mountains. Good habitat remains, and resident birds can move there, while migrating birds can pick prime habitat as they fly.

McCormack suspects a few short-term changes might happen during fire recovery. Insect-eating birds could fare better than seed eaters, for one. Birds that nest in cavities might find fewer nesting sites. So might Dark-eyed Juncos and Towhees, which nest in brush.

He also wouldn't be surprised to see some birds show up in some unusual places, such as chaparral residents, like Wrentits, visiting backyards.

As co-investigator of the Free-flying Los Angeles Parrot Project, or FLAPP, McCormack wonders how fires will affect the Red-crowned, Lilac-crowned and Red-lored Parrots of Altadena. A student will join FLAPP to study effects on the Nanday Parakeets of the Santa Monica Mountains.

The Eaton Fire might also stunt the return of the California Condor, he added. At least one tagged condor was seen at Echo Mountain in 2020.

"There was always a hope the California Condors would move across the San Gabriels and set up shop in Eaton Canyon," McCormack said, noting the canyon was a historical nesting site.

Sanderfoot suggests that birders focus on keeping birds resilient. "The way that we go about creating resiliency for our local bird populations is to take care of them year-round and not just in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

"We need to do what we can to lower our carbon footprint, to slow climate change. These are all hard things to do, but we need to do them all the time, not just because there was a fire."

Note: John McCormack invites K-12 students and teachers displaced by the Eaton and Palisades Fires to sign up for tours of the Moore Lab. Email him at mccormack@oxy.edu to learn more.



Ornithologist John McCormack, director and curator of the Moore Laboratory of Zoology at Occidental College.

Photo courtesy of Occidental College.

Keep Calm and Bird Deliberately by Carl Matthies

Most weekend mornings between November and April I head downstairs at dawn to watch the birds in my front yard for a while. I faithfully record my observations for a citizen science project called FeederWatch, a joint endeavor of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Birds Canada. Project participants provide ornithologists with data to assess populations of non-migratory and overwintering birds for the 100-plus North American species known to frequent feeders and home gardens. I joined the ranks of FeederWatchers five years ago to make a small contribution to their research, but, between us, that's not my main motivation for doing it anymore.

I am in the autumn of life, when its slings and arrows can start to accumulate: the failures, the regrets, and especially the losses, both personal and communal. They take a real toll, and of the many ways I have tried to cope, *slow birding* has been the most therapeutic for me. Evidently, I am not alone. Animal behaviorist Joan Strassman was compelled to write an entire book on the subject. Published around the time

the coronavirus pandemic had at last tapered off, *Slow Birding* implored us not to revert to our hurried pre-pandemic existence, at least not completely. Another slow birding champion is award-winning author Amy Tan, whose latest book, *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, charts her immersion into the lives of local avifauna and is a *New York Times* best-seller.

Watching the succession of avian visitors in the yard is a meditative activity. It's a sedentary, seemingly passive form of entertainment, yet it rewards keen attention. The sights and sounds of the microcosm draw you in, and you become engrossed in its rhythms, in its drama. Preoccupations don't disappear, but for the time being nerves are calmed. It's not for nothing that both FeederWatch and Project Phoenix have started asking participants about the mental health benefits of the experience.

As I sat at the window early on January 11, I thought I might see a much different bird community than I had the week before, because of the sheer hell that had transpired nearby in the days between. I didn't. Right on schedule,



Carl Matthies' backyard fountain attracted a couple of Swinhoe's White-eyes on January 11th.

a California Towhee showed up for a solitary breakfast; the usual variety of finches jockeyed for perches on the seed feeder; a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Townsend's Warbler, and a Hermit Thrush dropped by to bathe in the fountain; a familiar female Nuttall's Woodpecker announced its presence with some trills before sampling the suet; Mourning Doves cooed as they meandered in search of spilled nyjer; a peevisish Bewick's Wren darted through the yard, chiding the Dark-eyed Juncos in its path. And for the first time in days, a peace settled over me.

HOW TO SUPPORT BIRDS IN THE AGE OF WILDFIRES

Project Phoenix is a community science program for residents of California, Washington, and Oregon by Alicia Di Rado



Many birders wonder how they can protect the birds we know and love during these difficult times. Here's some good news: You can advance knowledge about the effects of wildfire smoke on birds, and you don't even have to leave home.

It only takes 10 minutes a week to volunteer for Project Phoenix, and it's so easy that kids and people new to birding can help.

Project Phoenix is a community science program that encourages residents of California, Washington, and Oregon to monitor birds during the traditional annual wildfire season of July through November.

Ecologist Olivia Sanderfoot, a postdoc in the lab of UCLA Professor Morgan Tingley, launched the program and has directed it since 2023. It's a collaboration between the UCLA La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

Scientists know surprisingly little about the effects of smoke on birds, even though wildfires are a normal part of many ecosystems, Sanderfoot said. That's a huge knowledge gap during our era of megafires — burns that are bigger and more intense than any we've known.

As wildfires are happening across many habitats and regions, scientists like Sanderfoot need the help of volunteers far and wide to gather data about birds. That's where Project Phoenix comes in.

Besides publishing research, Project Phoenix researchers are looking for evidence about practical steps people can take — and policy changes they can make — to improve the environment for birds.

"One of the things I'm passionate about is not only how birds are responding to smoke in real time, but also how we can help them," Sanderfoot said. "Are there particular resources they would benefit from? Perhaps they're burning through all their fat reserves migrating away from smoky areas, and putting out extra food and water would help. Maybe they are dehydrated and they could use a few more bird baths."

"These are hypotheses, but they are fueled by anecdotes and observations that have been shared with me by birders."

To learn more and register:

www.project-phoenix-investigating-bird-responses-to-smoke.org.

You will share information about where and when you will watch birds. You can bird anywhere, including at home watching your feeders. Then count birds for 10 minutes every week and share the results.

Head to bit.ly/Phoenix-PAS for a video about the project.

Read more about Olivia Sanderfoot's research on the previous page.

How Pasadena Humane Treated Wildlife After Fires

by Helin Jung

Cats with singed whiskers and dogs with darkened coats were among the many animals affected by the Eaton Fire, their sorry states tuggin at the heartstrings. Even Paris Hilton, who lost her home in the Palisades Fire, felt compelled to journey east to volunteer at Pasadena Humane, which, in the two weeks following the fire, took in over 900 animals, a vast majority of them domestic pets.

Getting less attention were the wild animals that had been impacted, such as the 37 birds under the care of Pasadena Humane's wildlife program. Peafowl, parrots, Band-tailed Pigeons, finches, and even a Barn Owl and a Red-shouldered Hawk showed up at their doors, all suffering from smoke inhalation and burns in their feathers. Some had sustained fractures and soft tissue damage.

The avian survival rate in the first week was about 50 percent, according to Lauren Hamlett, director

of Wildlife Education and Services at Pasadena Humane. Supportive care included cleaning off ash, treating broken bones, and providing fluid therapy, pain medication, antibiotics, and oxygen. In many cases, such as with the Barn Owl, injuries were too severe to overcome.

"Respiratory issues caused by smoke and particulate inhalation can be difficult to treat," Hamlett says. "It's hard with birds because they have such sensitive respiratory systems. They're not good at telling us how sick they are until they're dead, basically."

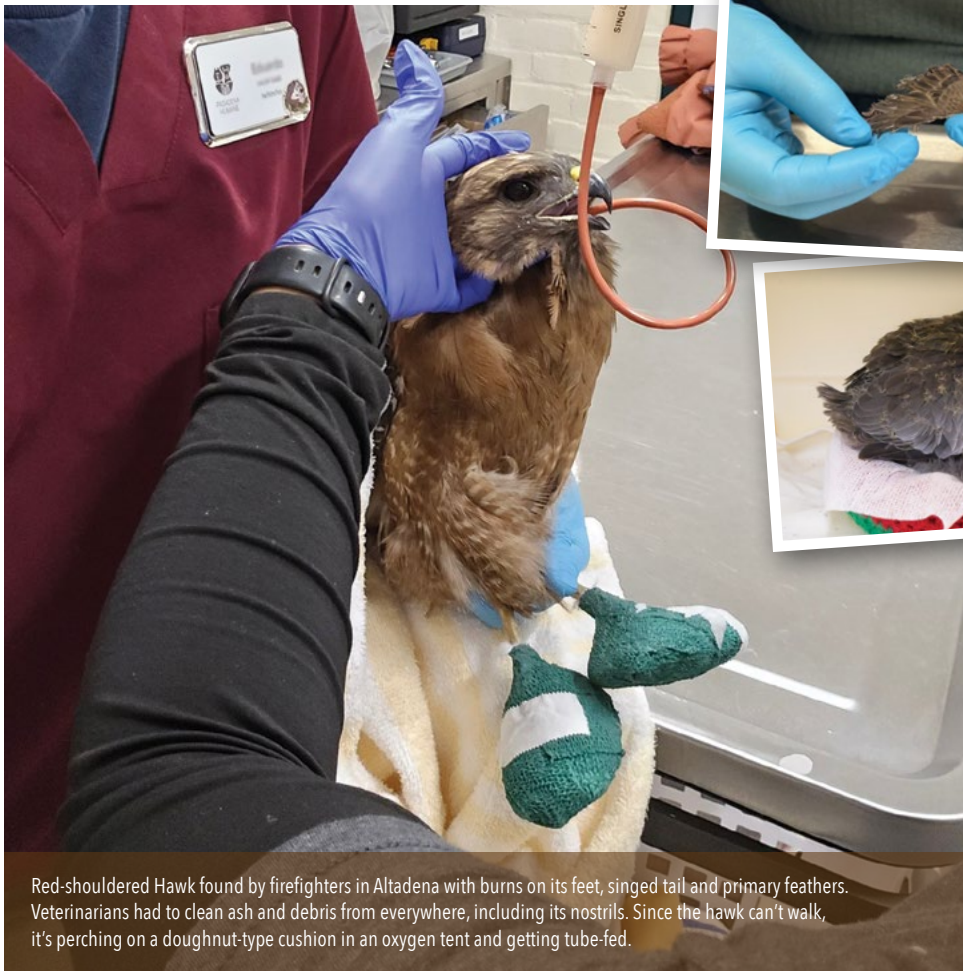
Because their skin can tear easily, birds with tissue burns can be difficult to treat as well. Birds with feather damage can be in recovery for a long time because the feathers need to molt before the birds can be released. After initial treatment, Pasadena Humane transfers wildlife to rehabilitation facilities elsewhere in Southern California.

"With birds, they have such good instincts to fly away and get out of there before we even know what's happening," Hamlett says. "I'm hopeful that a lot of birds were able to get out."

Even before Altadena residents were allowed back into their homes, there were reports of birds flocking to feeders. Other animals in those areas were being given food and water by fire-trained personnel.

As restricted areas become passable again, Hamlett anticipates that the number of wildlife patients at Pasadena Humane will increase, and that smaller, less mobile animals like quail and possums will be among those taken in, and that the process will be ongoing.

"It's going to be a marathon," Hamlett says. "We're definitely going to need community support going forward."



Photos courtesy of Pasadena Humane.

Red-shouldered Hawk found by firefighters in Altadena with burns on its feet, singed tail and primary feathers. Veterinarians had to clean ash and debris from everywhere, including its nostrils. Since the hawk can't walk, it's perching on a doughnut-type cushion in an oxygen tent and getting tube-fed.

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

above us,
the stars we've always known
are still shining



Tara Hempstead

FROM SPARKS TO FIRESTORMS: Important Issues on Human-Driven Climate Change

By Dave Weeshoff, PAS Conservation Chair

What we are experiencing with anthropogenic climate change now, in early 2025, is far different than any warming or cooling humanity has seen, in rate and in scale. It's occurring 20 to 50 times faster than the most rapid climate change events in Earth's history.

A very dry 2024 made Los Angeles County extremely susceptible to wildfires and, combined with record, fierce Santa Ana winds, created an environment where the smallest sparks could, and did, create multiple firestorms well beyond our capacity to contain and extinguish.

Ninety-nine percent of scientists agree that this change in climate is truly happening and that humans are the primary cause. We have known about climate change since the 1980s, and fossil fuel companies have known about it since the 1950s. The data is extensive and irrefutable.

The true costs of climate change have been significantly underestimated. Wildfires, tornados, flooding, and hurricanes are reaching new extremes of frequency and intensity, as evidenced by the more frequent occurrence of "billion dollar events"—the cost to recover from each disaster.

Rebuilding our neighborhoods—homes, stores, workplaces, nature centers, infrastructure—to a sustainable, resilient level will require cooperation of communities, politicians, developers, contractors, and conservation organizations. In short, everyone.

Climate change is progressing too quickly to allow species (e.g. our birds) to adapt. This rapid shift exacerbates the impact of other detrimental human activities, such as deforestation, habitat usurpation, water and air pollution, and the introduction of invasive species (plants, insects, etc.)

Plant and animal species are going extinct at 1,000 times the natural rate of extinction, including each of the world's 1,145 bird species that have uniquely evolved to thrive in relatively small environmental niches. They require many years to adapt to change, either through genetics or relocation.

So, what can we do to help the birds?

Remember, as seasons change, we must consider the intricate food webs for which they are part, their need for suitable accommodations, their need of suitable

nesting locations, the availability of water, and protection from predators.

The three most important things to consider are:

1) **How can each of us reduce our carbon footprint?** We can start by examining our individual situations to see what we can do with an increased focus. There are many ways to do so, and every effort helps.

2) **How can we collaborate as members of Pasadena Audubon?** As a Chapter, we can work with other climate change focused organizations to respond to the myriad of bird-habitat threats wherever they occur. Additionally, we can support activities to recover from the recent disasters.

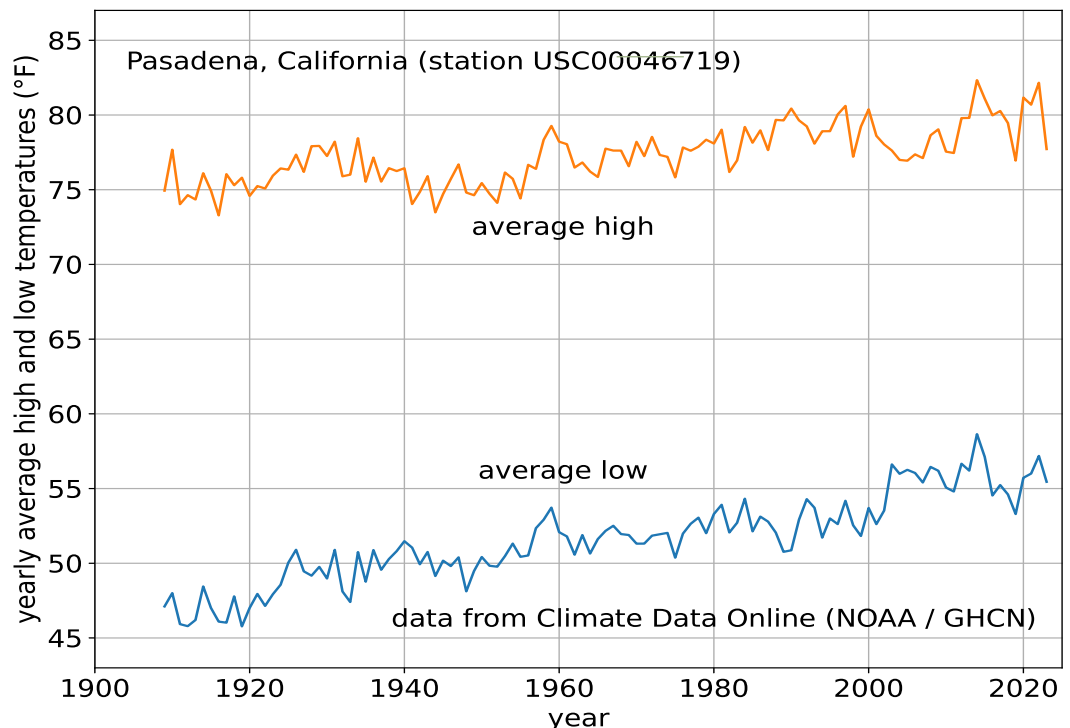
3) **How can we inspire others and share our commitment to addressing climate change?** By spreading awareness, demonstrating our enthusiasm, and actively engaging in meaningful actions, we can influence the trajectory of the severe consequences of climate change.

As usual, please contact Dave Weeshoff, Conservation Chair, at Weeshoff@sbcglobal.net or 818-618-1652 with any questions, comments, or to participate in any of our conservation efforts.

Temperature records over the last century indicate warming by several degrees in Southern California, including the Pasadena weather station near City Hall.

The graph shows daytime high temperature, and nighttime low, each averaged over full years.

The average high has increased by 3 degrees in the last 100 years, and the warming is most apparent in the average low, which has warmed by as much as 7 degrees over the same period.



Cenzontle Norteño: BIRDING IN TONGUES AT EATON CANYON

By Luke Tiller *Editor's Note: This article was written before the Eaton Fire and is a reminder of the powerful impact of Eaton Canyon in our community.*

On January 4th, I found myself assisting with our monthly field trip to Eaton Canyon. With over 45 participants signed up, Catherine Hamilton and I joined regular trip leaders Lulú Marin and Tom Mills to help guide the walk.

Pasadena Audubon Society couldn't run our myriad events without our many skilled and dedicated volunteers, and we are incredibly thankful for all of them. On this day, Tom brought an intimate knowledge of the park and its denizens, beyond just the birds. Lulú brought a welcoming presence and wonderful Spanish color commentary, telling us the Mexican translation of bird names seen on the trip. And Catherine brought her artistic eye, knowledge of birds from across the globe, and professional guiding skills.

The event had a vibrant diversity of birders in both age and experience. It was great to see a number of younger people on the trip. And the value of offering these bilingual walks was immediately impressed on me by the two mostly Spanish-speaking young children who joined us on the day.

I want everyone to have the same opportunity to get out and enjoy the birds here in Pasadena as much as I do. Our work creating those opportunities for local school kids and translating our Birding Guide book into Spanish are important steps in this direction. Although we've made a promising start, there's obviously still much work to be done.

One of the things I love most about PAS is our bird walks. Birding can sometimes be a solitary pursuit, but on walks you have the chance to get together with like-



minded individuals and enjoy the camaraderie of other birders. More eyes for spotting birds improves the chances of finding something fun too. I also love that everyone brings their own knowledge about the world around us. I always say the best way to improve one's birding is to spend time in the field with other birders. We talked about everything from native plants to how to identify Ruby-crowned Kinglets from Hutton's Vireos just by their behavior: It's all in the hover-gleaning!

The most memorable part of the walk for me was learning the Mexican name for Northern Mockingbird: Cenzontle Norteño. One of our Spanish-speaking participants explained that the name comes from centzontleh, the shortened form of centzontlahtōleh in the native language Nahuatl. It means "possessor of four hundred words," perhaps to suggest the mockingbird's infinite songs. What a fitting description for this magnificent mimic.

Though we didn't find anything rare this time, the trip was a wonderful way to kick off the Pasadena Audubon year. Sharing birds, knowledge, and stories with friends old and new.

Eaton Canyon is such an incredible local resource here in Pasadena, and PAS is thankful for the partnership with its dedicated staff and docents. Their support makes it possible for us to host walks, hold meetings, and organize field trips at this remarkable location.

We're currently talking to Los Angeles County about a little project that we hope will enhance the birding experience at Eaton Canyon. I hope to have news on that later in the year.

Birding Forecast by Luke Tiller

February and March are tough months for birding, with many wintering birds having left and relatively few summering birds having appeared.

Things to look out for are migrating raptors, especially those flying right along the foothill communities, and migrating hummingbirds at feeders: Allen's begin in January, Rufous in February, and Black-chinned in March.

They say one swallow doesn't make a summer, but the movement of swallows is something that I look forward to every year.

Though you can encounter them just whizzing through the foothills from March onward, it's nice to find a spot with water like Santa Fe Dam, Peck Road or Encanto Park Bridge where you can study the birds a little bit as they stop to hunt insects too. Swallow ID is one of those challenges for even your skilled birder and one that you can always work on to find other interesting species such as Purple Martin.



Northern Mockingbird © Tom Mills



FROM BEIJING TO PASADENA, A YOUNG BIRDWATCHER'S JOURNEY

Miles Wang, 12 years old

In the fall of 2021, I learned about birdwatching in my natural science class in Beijing, China. A few months later, on the sixth day of the Lunar New Year, my father and I took our cameras and joined a birding event at the Liuli River in Fangshan, an hour's drive from home. We were all eager to see the endangered Reed Parrotbill flock feeding on the seeds of the reeds.

Liuli River is a protected zone for Reed Parrotbills. They can nest and feed on the big areas of healthy reeds that they love so much. It was the first time I saw this stunning bird. My passion for birdwatching was rekindled and it has only grown since then.

So far, I have traveled to ten provinces in China and observed nearly 600 species of birds. Yunnan province is my favorite. I went there three times in one year. Black-winged Kite is my favorite bird. With black wings and a fat body of pure white, it's so cute.

The desire to explore and follow birds knows no boundaries. After a thousand days of birdwatching, I embarked on a significant migration of my own in 2024: from East Asia's Baiwang Mountain in Beijing to the San Gabriel Mountains in Los Angeles.

I have since settled in a city near Pasadena and discovered the Young Birders Club, where I met lots of new friends and go birding every weekend. Here, my birding journey has begun anew.

The birds in the USA seem a lot less afraid of people than the birds in China, although it also seems there are a lot less species here according to my experience in the past four months. For example, last August at Ballona Creek in Los Angeles, we saw 11 species of shorebirds, but in April at Nanpu Lagoon in Hebei, China, we saw 37 species of shorebirds, although not as close as we saw in L.A.

I'm looking forward to birding in this new year. On my wishlist, beyond California, I can't wait to see the special birds in Texas, Florida, and Alaska.



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

Documentary Shows Rehab for Local Hummingbirds

Hummingbird rehabber Terry Masear is the star of the new documentary *Every Little Thing*, alongside her tiny feathered patients, such as Cactus, Jimmy, and Wasabi.

Director and writer Sally Aitken follows Masear closely as she treats hummingbirds in Los Angeles, some with broken wings, others victims of cat attacks, and one that was doused with sugar water. Patiently, she helps them to fly again.

"The reactions have been very powerful and emotional. People relate to the fragility of the birds. It's filtered through our own lens of trauma and our own struggles," Masear said, herself sharing some of her own on the screen, such as a difficult childhood and the loss of her husband of 33 years in 2000.

As for the January fires in Los Angeles, she said the hummers were all right. "I got no calls about a bird being burned or anything like that. It's survival

for them. They see it coming, they get out."

She has a clue to where hummingbirds from Pacific Palisades might have evacuated to: "I've gotten a lot of calls from Santa Monica, and people are telling me that they have a lot more



hummingbirds around their feeders than they had a few weeks ago," she said. "I got no calls from the Pasadena area."

The movie premiered at the Sundance Film Festival last year and has been travelling to other events. Although not in theaters in L.A. anymore, it's showing around the country (<https://tinyurl.com/HummingbirdsMovieTheaters>). The production is working on streaming platforms and a deal with PBS. In March, the DVD will be on sale online (<https://tinyurl.com/hummingbirdDVD>).

Meanwhile, you can read Masear's bestselling memoir, *Fastest Things on Wings: Rescuing Hummingbirds in Hollywood*, an intimate glimpse into her 20 years of rescue work. Her website includes the 24/7 hotline and a link for donations: <https://www.losangeleshummingbirdrescue.org>

SOCIAL BIRDERS: 2024 Christmas Bird Count

Words by Sean Doorly; Photos by Sean Doorly and Lance Benner

Birders converged on Legg Lake, Eaton Canyon, Peck Road, Santa Fe Dam, and many other locations on Saturday, December 14, for the 2024 Pasadena Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. This beloved annual tradition brought together over 60 birders who scoured

45 locations within the 175-square-mile count circle, recording an impressive 154 species.

The festivities continued that evening at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center, where participants came together for the much-anticipated recap and dinner. Stories of the

day's discoveries brought oohs and aahs, and it was a lovely way to cap off the long day of birding adventures.

In the next *Wrentit*: read the full report by CBC organizer Jon Fisher.



PAS Young Birders Club at Eaton Canyon.



Luke Tiller and Mary Angel lead the Young Birders Club count at Eaton Canyon.



Phoebe, Emerson, and Jordan at Eaton Canyon.



Happy birder Lance Benner atop Mount Wilson.



Landy Figueroa, Luke Tiller, Catherine Hamilton, and Katarina Doorly.



Pasadena Audubon Society staff and board of directors.



Jon Fisher enthralled the crowd with the wrap-up presentation.



Deni Sinnott and Kathy Degner.



Hungry birders line up for delicious catered Italian food.



Omar Alui, Alicia Di Rado, and Helin Jung.

BINS TO BOLIVIA: From Donations to Action in Monteagudo's Wetlands

By Graham Hamby

The journey from Santa Cruz de la Sierra to Monteagudo is a seven-hour grind through scrubby vegetation and ranch-lands littered with the bright green coca bags that flutter in dry brush, blow like tumbleweeds across the highway, or embed themselves in the road itself. Our driver, his own hands often buried in one of these bags, bounced through busy roundabouts and five way intersections—the dusty chaos that was to be the hallmark of all our travels in Bolivia.

Lines of cargo trucks, big rigs, taxi-vans, and everyday Bolivians on foot waited hours or days for gasoline that may or may not come. In other parts of the country, highway blockades in Cochabamba were creating shortages of meat and other staples. We were a few weeks short of the rainy season and smoke from distant, uncontrolled fires hung heavy and constant. The smoke barely relented during spasms of brief downpour and then returned like a damp blanket. This wasn't going to be easy.

We had just spent three days birding in an incredibly scenic area of towering sandstone cliffs near Ambooró National Park, west of Santa Cruz, and were now heading to Monteagudo to meet our contact, Claribel Villarroel, a frequent collaborator with the Asociación de Bolivia de Ornitología (ASBOR). The mission was to deliver the equipment donated for Bins to Bolivia, a program started by Pasadena Audubon Society in 2021. The small town of Monteagudo was selected by ASBOR as a community where these optics could be put to good use. We took 12 binoculars, three lenses, one camera and one scope, all donated by generous PAS members.

Monteagudo lies within Bolivia's Chuquisaca serranía, a region characterized by a mountainous, corduroy-like system of steep ridges and valleys. The habitat here supports an interesting mixture of higher elevation montane species and birds that are more typically found in the dry Chaco region further east and south. We arrived tired and too late for birding in unfamiliar terrain, but met Claribel, her husband, and two-year-old son early the next morning for our trip to Laguna San Juan.

Claribel had been busy. She had organized a welcoming committee of local community members, school children, elders, a local official, and a ranger from the nearby national park to greet us. After brief introductions with homemade tea and cakes, we spent the morning birding and talking about the Laguna San Juan and the impact they hoped that PAS' contribution of optics might have in the area. For many, it was their first time seeing local birds through binoculars, and the level of excitement among young and old was amazing.

Laguna San Juan was once integrated into a vast wetland ecosystem bordering the Río Bañado. Now,



For some of the kids it was their first time seeing local birds through binoculars.



Graham and his Dad, Bill, talking with Claribel at the Laguna San Juan. This illegal road had recently appeared in the wetland area without warning.

hundreds of hectares of marshes and floodplains have been reduced to the size of a Trader Joe's parking lot. And yet, despite its small size (or maybe because of it) the laguna was covered with birds.

The importance of this place as breeding, nesting, and foraging

habitat as well as a resting stop for migrating species was evident from the number of jacanas, ibis, gallinules, and snipes foraging here. Looking around the margins, the ongoing pressures on the remaining wetland were obvious: roadbuilding and the subdivision of the land for agricultural development, cattle-grazing, and urbanization projects led literally to the water's edge. Despite the hard-won official legal protection of the Laguna San Juan (itself somewhat unique in Bolivia), the despoiling of the wetland has continued.

While the pressures here are the same across Bolivia and South America, the importance of small, grassroots community organizing that Claribel is doing was made clear, coupled with the scientific surveys and research that ASBOR is conducting in the area.

We hope that the small contribution of optics from PAS will help local community members in Monteagudo and beyond provide valuable citizen-science data from bird-population surveys, foster the growth of bird programs for children and adults, and build capacity for avi-tourism in the area.

The people we met talked about the enormity of what was once here and about the awe that those thousands of birds inspired in them. What inspired us was the resolve they had in protecting what's still here and their hopes of expanding and restoring this ecosystem.

With a long return journey ahead of us, we said our goodbyes. As we readied to go, a single pair of Southern Screamers, a species that once bred in the Laguna San Juan now eking it out in the nearby river, circled and landed close to the water's edge to feed.

More Info: ASBOR <https://bit.ly/4jpZFnk> EBird Hotspot: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L29240575>

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

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