

# the wren tit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 73 · NO. 5 | JUNE-AUGUST 2025



Pygmy Nuthatch © Grigory Heaton

## Getting to Know PAS President Luke Tiller

By Mary Angel

Two of my most memorable PAS field trips were led by Luke Tiller: a stunning trip to Bear Divide watching thousands of migrating birds fly over us; and a magical Young Birders Club trip to Millard Canyon after sunset, where we spotted a Common Poorwill with a tiny pinpoint flashlight, only to have the bird fly directly at us to the delighted gasps of the kids. I wanted to learn more about how our chapter leader came to know so much about birds, so I sat down with him in December.

Growing up in London, his father took him birdwatching, and he spent hours poring over the family's vast collection of field guides about mushrooms, butterflies, insects and, especially, birds. By the time he was a teenager, he was identifying birds for his friends on their fishing trips.

Tiller moved to Connecticut in 2003, and installed a birdfeeder in the yard. With his trusty Sibley Guide in hand, he familiarized himself with the local birds. When his neighbor, Joe, invited Luke to see some Redpolls in his yard, they became fast friends. Joe was a tour leader for Connecticut Audubon. They were looking for someone to oversee their marketing and membership management (which Luke had



previously done in the UK), so he applied and was hired for the job.

During Fall migration, he'd go to the Connecticut River where "...something like 200,000–400,000 tree swallows would come and roost in this marsh on the river. At dusk you'd see hundreds of thousands of them just pouring like a tornado. Then they would all funnel down into the marsh. That's the kind of thing where people actually clap or cheer at the end of it."

In 2010, Luke joined the Quaker Ridge hawkwatch with Audubon Greenwich to monitor

raptor populations during migration. He sat on the board of the Hawk Migration Association of North America from 2012–2018. He still leads overseas raptor tours.

He moved to California in 2012 to join his partner, Catherine Hamilton, who had reconnected with her childhood Audubon, PAS, and he began leading field trips. Aware of his many connections to the birding world, Deni Sinnott, the President at the time, offered him the Program Chair position in 2015. He became the Field Trip Chair in 2018, and President in 2022. He truly believes in the PAS mission. "For me, the most important thing is that we are open and welcoming to birders of all levels of expertise and experience."

**"I like some spectacle with my birdwatching."**

Tiller follows the birds. In 2018 he travelled to Panama City after reading a report of a raptor migration day in 2015 where two and a half million birds flew over, prompting an airport closure for two days to avoid collisions. He saw almost a million birds there in one day.

*Continued on page 8*

## Monthly Chapter Meetings

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

► WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18 7:00-8:30pm, Online via Zoom

**Everything You Always Wanted to Know about eBird with John Garrett**

**eBird** eBird has been the greatest birding invention since the field guide. Since its creation in 2002 eBird has grown to be the biggest cooperative science project on the planet, and the statistics are staggering—more than a billion bird sightings recorded, with more than 100 million expected this year alone. How does eBird handle all of that data? And how can we, as birders, make better use of everything eBird has to offer? Join us as an eBird expert answers all your questions!

## Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► JUNE 10, 7:00-8:30pm (No meetings in July and August)

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

## Annual Banquet and Trivia Slideshow

► SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 6:30-8:15pm,

Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church;

301 N. Orange Grove Blvd., Pasadena

Spend a summer evening with us at this family-friendly event and enjoy a delicious banquet with vegan and gluten-free options.

We will have a heartwarming recognition of our dedicated volunteers with the PAS Heroes Awards and our fan-favorite bird photo trivia slideshow! Everyone is welcome to share up to three photos for the game when you sign up for the event (by June 10). Tickets are \$40 per person and \$25 per child.

More info: <https://www.pasadenaudubon.org/events>

## Social

► JUNE 25, JULY 23, 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!

## chapter news

### PALISADES BIRD CLUB

By Helin Jung

There were many reasons to be anxious. It was the first official birding excursion for most of the participants. It was the first time any of them had met the trip leaders or even been to the Ballona area in Playa Del Rey. There was rain in the forecast. Then, the biggest sticking point of all: A call time of 8:30 a.m. On a Saturday, no less. “As high schoolers, it really scared us to get up so early,” says Madeleine Wolfe, a senior at Palisades Charter High School. “I usually wake up at 9.”

Wolfe had reached out to Pasadena Audubon Society in her capacity as the president of the Pali High Bird Club, or just “Bird Club” to the 18 members who have been meeting weekly to learn about birds since January 2024. Palisades Charter High School had been damaged in the Palisades Fire. The environmental studies classroom where Bird Club used to meet had burned down. “In a time like this it is important that us students can gather and continue with our activities,” Wolfe wrote.

Which is how she convinced three other Bird Club members—Elodie Chien, Sabrina Hall, and Yuan Li Lai—their AP Environmental Studies teacher Steve Englemann, and three representatives of PAS—Jodhan Fine, Omar Alui, and myself—to join her for a birding field trip by the sea.

The morning began at Del Rey Lagoon, with a variety of water birds to point out right away. One club member, whose middle name was the word for a Hawaiian duck, fittingly expressed an affinity for ducks and valiantly attempted to commit every species to memory.

Continuing along the jetty down Ballona Creek, there were gulls and shorebirds, and a thrilling encounter with a Peregrine Falcon chasing a pigeon. Of the 54 species observed on the walk, a few favorites were the Surf Scoter, the Sanderling, and the Black Oystercatcher (“I love how vibrant the orange around the eyes is against the black,” Chien says).

Standing at the end of the jetty, Englemann pointed out the burned hillsides in the distance. His classroom was gone. So was the meteorite he’d been given by a student, and the life-size cardboard cutout of a California Condor that the founding president of Pali High Bird Club had constructed.



(From left) Yuan Li Lai, Palisades High School AP Environmental Studies Teacher Steve Englemann, Sabrina Hall, Madeline Wolfe, Elodie Chien, Helin Jung, Omar Alui, and Jodhan Fine pause for a portrait during their coastal birding adventure to Del Rey Lagoon and Ballona Creek. The pair of Black Oystercatchers was among the 54 species of birds tallied.

In spite of the tragedy and disruption in their lives, the attendees giggled through most of the two hours spent outside. They got ecstatic when they successfully photographed a bird by pointing their phones through a binocular lens. Seeing each other in person was the best part of the trip, they said. The birding was fun, too, “and so worth” getting up early for.

“Being online, it’s so much harder to learn about birds,” Wolfe says. Though one of the members sets up a feeder cam during their Zoom meetings, they aren’t in nature looking “at the same birds at the same time.”

With a few months left in the school year, the club has plans to organize a field trip to a local park where the members will act as birding guides for their parents. “That’s how we’ll get our parents into it,” Chien says, just as the club had sparked her interest in birds.

The bird club members’ experiences in the past year had led to changes in their ways of being in the world. They could “feel smart” by identifying different species. Simply the act of noticing birds could slow them down and make them feel good. “I used to listen to music on hikes,” Wolfe says. “I’d rather listen to birds chirp now.”



## Remembering Larry Wayne Allen (1943-2025)

The birding community lost a beloved and prominent member with the passing of Larry Wayne Allen in early April. He was a recognized authority on both gull identification and the naturalized parrot populations. He could be readily identified from afar by the trusty field hat he wore atop an impressive mane of salt and pepper curls. Above all he was a kind spirit and a dear friend, and he is keenly missed. A few of his friends share fond memories of him below.



*"First, Larry was a really nice guy! Friendly and kind with a genuine smile, Larry always asked how you were doing and what you were working on; and he actually cared.*

*A Renaissance man with interests in history, active (past President) in The Southern California Early Music Society since 1976, and, of course, birds and everything about them. He was a true bibliophile building an extensive library.*

*He mastered Gull identification and led many trips and workshops to help people decipher field marks of this vexing group. He did the same for our local Parrots leading late afternoon trips to their roosts.*

*Donor to multiple educational and environmental causes, Larry gave my wife and I (at least twice) year-long passes to the Huntington Gardens he'd received as a significant donor.*

*He was a coordinator for the 5 years of the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas project, and produced initially (with Kimball Garrett) the Atlas Handbook (1995) to educate birders on the methodology and assigning of blocks for coverage. He put a great deal of time into researching and writing, as a co-author, of the detailed Atlas, published in 2016. I was honored to be asked to write the forward for the Atlas just as it was being finalized. (Larry told me it was his late wife Marylin who recommended me).*

*It was devastating to hear of the loss of his house in the Eaton Fire, then the loss of Larry himself. I had reached out to him after the fire with an email to see if there was anything we could do to help and he just answered that he'd found an assisted living house for now.*

*I am a better person for having known Larry, and his floppy black hat, and he has been inspiring to me to work harder for the birds, education and protection of bird habitats."*

—Mickey Long

*"The first time I saw Larry, I confess that I was taken aback by his very full beard and bushy hairstyle. I learned not to sit behind him and his wife Marilyn at Audubon meetings if I wanted an unobstructed view of the screen! He looked a little like a wild man. But very quickly, I learned that he was a very kind, soft-spoken, gentle man who knew a lot about birds and was an excellent teacher. He even helped me figure out gulls! Besides birds, he and I shared a love of early music, especially composers like JS Bach and Monteverdi. His love of early music led him to sit on the board of Jouissance Early Music Ensemble. We also shared many a bottle of excellent Pinot Noir and a love of William Morris. I will cherish the memories of every conversation we ever had, especially the sound of his rich, slow laugh.*

*Larry, I shall miss you very much, but I'm very glad that we were on the earth at the same time. The world was a better place with you in it."*

—Laura Solomon

*"It is no understatement to say that Larry Allen was a huge force in the birding scene in southern California, and while I am honored to write about his impact on our knowledge and appreciation of the region's birdlife, I would hasten to add that his contributions in a variety of other fields, most notably early music and musical instruments, were many. Others might write passionate remembrances of Larry without even mentioning birds.*

*We all benefitted from Larry's expertise. His passion for birds was expressed as an educator, researcher, author, citizen scientist, world traveler, and, perhaps most importantly, a warm friend to so many of us. He led field trips and gave lectures and workshops that made us all better birders, with a special passion for gulls. We are*

*now in an age when gull identification focuses down to the level of fine feather and structural patterns to distinguish species and even hybrids and unnamed taxa, warranting massive book treatments with thousands of photographs. But Larry made gulls understandable to the average and beginning birder, sparking more interest than the compendia of gull minutiae available nowadays could ever do. As a citizen scientist, Larry was always eager to dive in and help with Christmas Bird Counts, parrot roost counts, breeding bird surveys, and almost any other effort that needed dedicated help. He was a presence at almost all Western Field Ornithologists conferences, willing to help in any way he was needed. He compiled the Malibu Christmas Bird Count for many years and helped immensely with early efforts to monitor parrot populations in the Los Angeles Region. But Larry's most lasting contribution to field ornithology was his work as senior author of the Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas. Larry did the lion's share of the analysis and writing, and along with his long-time partner and wife, the late Marilyn Morgan, he also shepherded the layout and production of the final product. Larry's insights and research and writing skills are evident on almost every one of the Atlas's nearly 660 pages. Do Larry a favor and sit down and read through that marvelous book.*

*I'll remember Larry as a supremely kind and generous polymath who never hesitated to apply his passion and talent to field ornithology projects, education, and conservation. And I'll miss that laugh."*

—Kimball Garrett

Memorial services will be held on June 19th, 4pm at Trinity Lutheran Church (997 East Walnut Street, Pasadena 91106). Please RSVP before June 14th to Alex at [alexandraopsahl@gmail.com](mailto:alexandraopsahl@gmail.com).



## SOCIAL BIRDERS

Words and photos by Sean Doorly

Young Birder Katarina Doorly led the Pasadena Audubon Society's Young Birders Club on a field trip to Bear Divide in mid-April. The group scanned the skies and trees and spotted a Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flickers, Nashville Warblers, and more. The young birders also got a close look at the Bear Divide Banding Station, where researchers carefully banded and released birds.

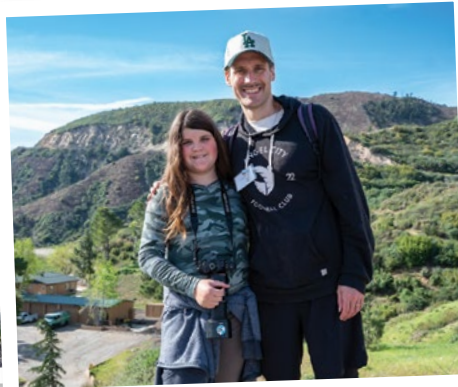
On the fourth Wednesday in April, birders gathered for the ever-popular Birds and Beers meetup at Wild Parrot Brewing Company. With fresh brews in hand, birders shared recent sightings and migration stories and even took part in a show-and-tell featuring a new bird feeder.

May started quietly as Alex Coffey led Pasadena Audubon's second Bird Sit at Arlington Garden. Despite a drizzle, participants settled in to observe and listen. A total of 23 species were recorded, including a newly fledged Dark-eyed Junco and an Anna's Hummingbird feeding its young.

### Bear Divide



Young Birders Club at Bear Divide.



Katarina Doorly and Jared Nigro.



Bear Divide Bander Lauren Hill.

### Birds & Beers



Ellen Fiol and Bob Hough making the scene.



Trevor, Carla, and Elizabeth—birders, brews, and big smiles.



Jodhan Fine and Omar Alui: proving birders don't just lift binoculars.

### Bird Sit at Arlington Garden



On the lookout for feathered friends at Arlington Garden.



Birders who didn't let a little rain stop the bird sit.



Binoculars up—Alex Coffey is on the lookout.



## My Experience with the Young Birders Club

by Emerson Walsh, 14 years old

I got into birding in the year 2020, when the pandemic was raging around the world and isolating people at home. I had just moved from my apartment to a house with a small backyard. I started seeing many more birds than before and quickly got into birding. What I didn't know was that I had just stepped on the tip of the iceberg, because I would soon after join PAS, at age 11, and attend my first bird walk in 2022 at Arroyo Seco. On this walk, I saw a Great Horned owl and its hatchlings, which were very cute. Some of my other favorite bird walks over the years have been the night hikes, where we've seen birds like owls and poorwills. Another place I like to visit is Bear Divide, because it is always amazing to see the work being done there by their wonderful team who bands birds, and getting to see and even

release some of the birds they band is really incredible. Parrot roost walks are always cool, too. Aside from it being very loud there, seeing all those birds together is truly fantastic. One of my other favorite things about the birding club is the monthly meetings that we have, which are always fun because I have met new people and learned a lot of new things about more than just birds, like fungi and plants. Fast forward, and it's 2025 and here I am 14 years old and still in the Young Birders Club! I really appreciate this group because without it I never would have seen so many places or birds. And I never would have met any of the people I did in this birding club, who have taught me even more than I ever could have imagined when I started. Best wishes to my fellow birders!



A Yellow-headed Amazon at Arlington Garden, and an Allen's Hummingbird visiting Emerson's yard.

## conservation & advocacy

### Retirement as a Wildlife Rehabilitator

by Dave Weeshof

In February of 2005 I began my volunteer adventures rehabilitating wild aquatic birds at the International Bird Rescue (IBR) Center in San Pedro. Since then I've discovered the amazing physiological, behavioral, and environmental aspects of wild birds and why rehabilitating these animals is so important to me, to our birding community, and especially to the individual animals that need our care.

Over 2,000 birds a year arrive at the Center due to various injuries, starvation, fishing equipment entanglement, gunshots, diseases, parasites, intentional mutilation, broken bones, orphaned, etc. Each bird is individually examined and has a personalized treatment plan. Like all wildlife rehabilitators, IBR strives to rehabilitate the animals such that they can be returned to wild where they will thrive. If it is determined by a licensed veterinarian that the animal cannot be released, it is humanely euthanized. Occasionally a bird (usually a raptor) may be suitable for educational purposes and, under a special permit, be shown in public.

Prior to the Covid pandemic in early 2021, I would spend every Monday in the Center caring for over 70 species of birds that live in, and rely on, water - gulls, ducks, herons, pelicans, albatrosses, boobies, cormorants, loons, grebes, shorebirds, etc. My duties included detailed evaluation of incoming birds, cleaning pools and cages, washing/rinsing oil from feathers, blood analysis, food preparation and distribution,



The author (left) back in 2009, tending to a California Brown Pelican that had a fish hook stuck in its pouch. The wound healed nicely and the bird was ultimately released back into the wild.

medicating, laundry, facilities maintenance, and an occasional necropsy. I would also conduct community outreach events at off-site venues: tabling, lectures, demonstrations, etc. I also participated in four oil-spill events in California as well as the 2010 Deepwater Horizon catastrophe in the Gulf of (at the time) Mexico.

Covid changed my responsibilities (and reduced my commute!). When it hit, due to the risk of transmission, no volunteers were allowed, and all activities were performed by the paid professional staff. One thing that could be done to reduce staff workload was to answer the many phone calls received from the public asking for advice about bird interactions, etc. From that

period on, through the implementation of a new phone system, experienced volunteers respond to the calls from their homes. I spend every Friday doing so.

There are five major wild bird rehabilitators in Los Angeles County. While International Bird Rescue specializes in aquatic birds, others attend to raptors, hummingbirds, passerines, corvids, etc., some specializing, others various combinations. Cities in the immediate Pasadena area are blessed by the Pasadena Humane Society and their capabilities for treatment of mammals and avian species but refer aquatic birds to IBR and raptors and corvids to others. Countless birds are treated every year by these dedicated, compassionate organizations.

During my 20 years at IBR there have been about 10 major events that affect hundreds of individual birds of one species or another. Mass starvation of brown pelicans, habitat disturbance of terns, nesting site destruction of cormorants, and locations where various nestling herons were forced from their nests. In each event IBR has released between 30 and 300 birds that otherwise would have died.

As of this writing, more than 150 Brown Pelicans have been brought to the IBR San Pedro Center due to mass starvation or domoic acid poisoning (harmful algae bloom). Please visit [BirdRescue.org](http://BirdRescue.org) for much more information as well as a live webcam showing many Brown Pelicans in the large aviary.

As usual, please call me at (818) 618-1652 to chat or email me at [weeshof@sbcglobal.net](mailto:weeshof@sbcglobal.net) about wildlife rehabilitation, conservation, and advocacy.



## PARK DOCENT ENLIGHTENS VISITORS

### There's Much More to Native Plants Than Meets the Eye

words and photos by Fernanda Ezabella

Ron Peterson, a retired scientist and naval engineer, has a unique way of finding three species of willows growing side by side in a 2,300-acre reserve in Southern California.

"They're 29 steps left of this bridge," says Peterson, 74, leading a group of visitors through the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve in Imperial Beach. "A rock on the ground marks the spot."

Peterson, a volunteer docent since 2015, lost 95% of his vision six years ago. Unsure at first how to keep helping, he began using his remaining senses. Now, he can identify around 50 native plant species by touch, smell, or sound. Once a month, he shares this knowledge through free sensory walks, accompanied by his guide dog, a Labrador named Gidget.

"I hope to create more appreciation for native plants—not just visually, but through all senses, even taste," he says.

The estuary lies where the Tijuana River meets the Pacific Ocean, less than 1.5 mile from the Mexican border. Once a dumping ground, the area became protected in the 1980s and underwent restoration. Still, pollution from across the border remains an issue.

At the willows, Peterson feels around for the marker rock. Everyone pitches in. "It works nine out of ten times," he jokes. He identifies the first willow—**Arroyo**—with thick, elongated leaves and fly larvae bumps. The second is **Narrow-leaf**, with finer leaves. The third, a **Black Willow**, has serrated edges.

Peterson often asks the group if a plant is blooming or has leaves. His favorite is the **Bladderpod**, known for its strong smell—earning it the nickname "witch's fart." Its inflated seed pods rattle when dry, making a sound he recognizes instantly.

Sound also helps him find **Lemonade Berry** shrubs. "When it's flowering, it's full of bees. If I hear buzzing, I don't reach in," he warns. If safe, he samples a seed: "Lemonade flavor!"

**California Sagebrush** (a.k.a. "cowboy cologne") is easy to detect by smell. "Cowboys used it before visiting brothels; the native Kumeyaay used it before hunting to mask their scent," he says.

In front of an **Indian Mallow**, he has the group



Ron Peterson tells a tour group about how indigenous people utilized the Toyon shrub.

feel Gidget's soft ears, then the leaf. The similarity surprises everyone.

Along the Hummingbird Corridor, **Baja Bush Snapdragon** flowers bloom like multiple red lips. "We call them Mick Jagger," says Peterson. "Breaks my heart that I can't see them anymore."

April is the best time to visit, during peak spring. In summer, many plants go dormant, and the estuary smells different—often unpleasant due to polluted water. Imperial Beach's beach remained closed to swimmers for a few years, reopening in 2024.

"Sometimes the smell at night is annoying," Peterson admits. "But my wife and I kind of appreciate it—it keeps the town quiet and affordable. We're not packed like Ocean Beach or La Jolla."

Originally from Virginia, Peterson spent 40 years as a Navy engineer developing software for submarines and high-speed ships. "It was fun, but I often thought, 'I wish I were a park ranger.' I wanted to be in nature, not behind a screen."

After retiring in California, he began volunteering at the estuary—removing invasive species, planting natives, and maintaining trails. He also volunteers with the Braille Institute and the University of San Diego.

"Losing your vision can feel like falling into a hole. Volunteering helped pull me out," he says. "It shifted my focus from my own problems to helping others. That's what really worked for me."



Ron's "Mick Jagger" flower, a blooming Baja Bush Snapdragon.

## CLARK'S NUTCRACKER

### Classic Corvid of the High Country

by Carl Matthies

I grew up in the South Bay, a fifteen-minute drive from Torrance Beach. One lazy summer I think I spent almost every afternoon there. I was awfully lucky to have had such easy access to the beautiful California Coast, yet when I moved inland to the foothills for college and started getting acquainted with the Angeles National Forest, I soon realized I'm more of a mountain person than a sea person. I love the scent of pine, the lonely sound of the wind blowing through the trees, the bracing air, and the awe-inspiring vistas. And I love the plants and animals that call the mountains home.

Among my absolute favorites is Clark's Nutcracker, a rowdy corvid (is there another kind?) whose grayscale palette of plumage belies a very unsubtle personality. If you've never been in the mountains, chances are you've never seen a Clark's Nutcracker, for they seldom venture much below 3,000 feet and are often found closer to the tree line, at around 11,000 feet. And for those who have seen them, I would lay odds you heard them before you saw them. On several occasions, I've been backpacking in the Sierras or the San Gabriels, tucked out from the exertion and the altitude, only to be reinvigorated by a welcoming committee of Clark's Nutcrackers making all kinds of racket in the treetops.

Along with crossbills, nuthatches, and numerous other mountain denizens, Clark's Nutcrackers mainly subsist on a diet of pine nuts. They can be seen furiously excavating even the toughest of pine cones with their sharp sturdy bills before tucking up to 150 seeds in special sublingual pouches for temporary storage. Every summer, a Clark's Nutcracker will cache thousands of these seeds in the soil for retrieval in the leaner months ahead. And like Mountain Chickadees, Clark's Nutcrackers have remarkable but not infallible recall concerning the location of their caches. Forgotten caches allow for the propagation of conifers, most notably the Whitebark Pine, whose seeds are loaded with fat and protein to appeal to the birds they rely on for dispersal.

From studies of their foraging behavior, researchers have surmised that in some high-alpine forests, nearly every Whitebark Pine in sight represents the handiwork of a Clark's Nutcracker.



With its seed pouch plainly bulging, a Clark's Nutcracker swoops in to harvest even more from a Limber Pine in the Rocky Mountains.. © Richard Bunn ML191525511

Now that these trees are officially listed as “threatened” due to a combination of invasive Blister Rust Fungus, Mountain Pine Beetle, climate change, and decades of wildfire suppression, biologists see this symbiotic relationship with Clark's Nutcrackers as crucial to their recovery.

The reproductive biology of these birds is equally remarkable. Pairs seem to form exclusive bonds that can last for several years, though strict monogamy has not been proven beyond all doubt. Both male and female gather twigs, but the female alone constructs the nest as the male stands guard on a nearby perch. Nests are built on the leeward side of conifers in the lower reaches of mountain forests, so the weather is a little less severe for chicks that hatch in the dead of winter. Unique among corvids, male Clark's Nutcrackers develop a brood patch and assist with incubation. Breeding early in the year allows fledglings to mature enough to cache their own food in their first summer of life.

The boisterous antics of Clark's Nutcrackers are well-documented, lest anyone question their kinship with crows and jays. They typically forage in loose flocks, sometimes amicably, sometimes not, as one in the midst of feeding is liable to be rudely jostled out of the way by another who'd like to finish its meal. When the winds are up, they perform aerial acrobatics for the sheer fun of it. Mobbing smaller raptors, like American Kestrels and Sharp-shinned Hawks, likewise appears to be a form of entertainment. Squirrels are usually too big for them to bully, so Clark's Nutcrackers steal cones from their middens instead. Nutcrackers in the National Parks have also been the bane of many a camper, pilfering from picnic tables whenever the opportunity presents itself.

The future for Clark's Nutcrackers is inextricably tied to the health of the coniferous forests on which they depend. As stands of Whitebark Pine and other nutrient-rich cone crops have dwindled, so too have Clark's Nutcracker populations. To the extent these declines can be undone or exacerbated by the choices we make, their future also depends on us.

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

► **thank you to our wonderful donors!** *Your generous support keeps our community thriving. A special thank you to everyone who contributed to our "Bins to Ghana" Flash Fundraiser. It was such a smashing success that we hit our goal in just a couple of hours!! The binoculars arrived in Ghana about a week ago, and we'll be sure to share the feel-good story of their delivery in the next Wrentit.*

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PAS President Luke Tiller, continued from page 1

He leads trips to the Bear Divide during Spring migration. "It's an incredibly visceral experience, seeing those birds zipping by, and going to the banding station to see them in the hand in a way that people don't generally get to see birds."

When I ask what's next on his bucket list, he mentions Besh Barnag in Azerbaijan. "They have an incredible migration of all kinds of birds—flamingos, cranes, and such. But the one I would really like to see, from my bird books when I was a boy, is a Little Bustard. They have days where over 100,000 fly over. It's a weird place—a desert

with a mountain on the edge of a lake in the middle of nowhere. That's what appeals to me."

He's an environmental consultant and leads guided birdwatching and natural history tours all over the world. His passion is not only sharing his knowledge of birds, but also the destinations. A strong advocate for the Salton Sea, he conducts surveys and co-leads tours at their Bird Festival. Over the years, he's witnessed the salinity become so high that fish can no longer survive there, but arthropods and shorebirds are plentiful. "It's this weird lake in the desert with these outsider

communities around it, like Slab City and Bombay Beach, so that's intriguing. I really love the desert and mountains because I grew up in England and we don't have either of those. So those are my two favorite places to go birding."

I ask Luke what his vision is for PAS. "The thing that's been amazing to me is how much the organization has grown since the pandemic. There's been 40% growth since 2020. That's really exciting to me, because I want as many people as possible to get to experience the thing that I love, which is birdwatching."

To learn more about Luke, please go to: <https://www.birdinglosangeles.com/>