

the wren-tit

PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | VOLUME 74 · NO. 4 | APRIL-MAY 2026



Lazuli Bunting © Luke Tiller

president's perch 

Primetime Birding By Luke Tiller

If there was a way that my bank balance could handle it, I would be spending all my waking hours for the next couple of months getting outside and enjoying nature. April is primetime for seeing migrant birds in Los Angeles County as they wend their way north to breeding sites across the U.S. and Canada. The crescendo of migration typically hits its peak in terms of diversity around the last week of the month. Though things often slow down a little in May, good days can still be had.

Though I'm lucky enough to work outside as a wildlife biologist, it's not always in the most appealing of habitats: Often I find myself monitoring roadways and cell towers. The wonderful thing about birds though is that they can show up almost anywhere, and exciting discoveries can be had just by stepping outside. One of my favorite birding finds was a flyover **Franklin's Gull** while I was monitoring a suburban site by the Shops at Montebello. Getting paid to see beautiful birds is hard to beat!

One of the unique highlights of migration here in California is the Bear Divide Migration

site. Pasadena Audubon Society are very proud sponsors of this count in the western San Gabriels and are thrilled that Jodhan Fine, our Community Engagement Liaison, will be back counting at the site for a number of mornings each week over the season. You can read Jodhan's account of this amazing bird migration spectacle on page 3.

Though southbound fall migration appeals to the seasoned birder when it comes to the promise of avian waifs and strays, spring holds a myriad of delights. Best of all is that most birds are in peak breeding finery when it comes to plumage rather than the dull greens and yellows that make up the colors of many fall neotropical migrants.

Spring is also the time to be working on your aural birding skills. The invention of Merlin is a real boon to those wanting to check their homework when it comes to identifying bird song. Like most things it's not infallible. It is, however, an incredible addition to the birder's toolbox.

Of course my favorite way to learn more about birds is to get out in the field with other

birders, and we hope you'll take advantage of the opportunities PAS offers to do that with a myriad of field trips and workshops.

This spring also sees action heating up across the state when it comes to nesting birds, and with us entering year one of the statewide *California Bird Atlas*, there's plenty of valuable observations to be made. My interest in desert oases for birding (and herping) will hopefully give me a little time to do some "atlassing" in areas that don't often receive a lot of coverage when it comes to nesting birds.

With about 16,500 three-mile by three-mile atlas blocks across the state, there's a lot of places to cover. That means there's lots of interesting birding adventures to be had, especially if you like exploring under-visited parts of this amazing state or if you just happen to have an aunt or uncle in Alpine County. This project offers the perfect opportunity to get out there and tally some valuable data when it comes to nesting birds.

As I always say at this time of year—coffee is for birders only! ABB: Always Be Birding!

calendar

April Chapter Meeting

► WEDNESDAY, 4/15 7:00-8:30pm, via Zoom

Four Seasons in Hahamongna with Darren Dowell

Darren will recount some of the reasons why he got hooked on Hahamongna on the first visit and has returned over a thousand times since. The presentation will give a virtual tour of the site and a little of the history, make some recommendations of how to bird the park through the year, discuss some of the conservation issues and ongoing efforts to address them, and run through a top



10 list of the most rewarding and surprising birds that have been found at Hahamongna over the years.

Darren Dowell has lived in Pasadena since 1997, employed by Caltech and JPL. Through the expertise of folks at PAS shared generously and enthusiastically, an interest

in the outdoors became focused on birds about two decades ago. Since then, Darren has done three tours of duty on the PAS board, as program chair, vice president, and field trip chair. If you're trying to catch him out birding, try Hahamongna first.

Zoom link at www.pasadenaudubon.org/meetings

May Chapter Meeting

► WEDNESDAY, 5/20 7:00-8:30pm - TBA

Free Bird Walks

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

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

Social

► WEDNESDAYS, APRIL 22, MAY 27 5:00-8:00pm

Birds & Beers

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

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

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

► APRIL 14, MAY 12, 7:00-8:30pm

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



chapter news

PAS Seeks Presidential Nominees

The Pasadena Audubon Society Board of Directors seeks candidates for the organization's next President.

This is a volunteer officer position on the Board of Directors for a renewable two-year term beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028. The President directs the organization's vision and efforts, offers input and leadership for the organization's operations, leads monthly board meetings, and contributes to communication platforms to help ensure effective participation in the Society's matters.

The President works closely with the Executive Director, Board Members, and the general membership for the following duties:

Oversee the development and implementation of the Society's fiscal year budget. The budget is drafted in May and voted on in June of every year.

Work with the Board and Executive Director on employee salaries and annual raises.

Write "President's Perch" article for each issue of *The Wren*.

Write the Annual Appeal letter to all constituents.

Attend a majority of Pasadena Audubon Society social events, such as the June Banquet, Christmas Bird Count, New Members Reception, Birds & Beers, etc.

Offer input and evaluation on the organization's master calendar and annual fiscal budget.

Lead all Board meetings and direct all general board matters.

If you are interested or have follow-up questions, please email Pasadena Audubon's Executive Director, Jared Nigro, at jaredn.pas@gmail.com.

Please send a copy of your resume or CV along with a one-paragraph bio detailing your history and knowledge of Pasadena Audubon Society, your knowledge of, and experience with, organizational or non-profit leadership, your birding experience, and understanding of the local, national, and international birding community.

Materials for interested persons will be reviewed by a Board Nominating Committee in April and considered for nomination. Nominated candidates will be submitted to the Pasadena Audubon Society membership for vote in the spring General Meeting. The role will begin on July 1, 2026.

ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A FOURTH GRADER?
TAKE OUR BIRD SCIENCE PROGRAM QUIZ!

BIRDS & BEERS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22
5 PM TO 8 PM

WILD PARROT BREWING COMPANY

2302 E COLORADO BLVD, PASADENA





Meet Christina Fung, New PAS Treasurer

Christina Fung, CPA, ABV, CFE, ACAMS, is a principal with GHJ Advisors, a top 100 public accounting firm headquartered in Los Angeles. Christina specializes in forensic accounting and litigation support. In her role, she works closely with individuals to address the obstacles that could threaten their businesses, providing litigation support and forensic and fraud investigation services. Prior to starting her career in public accounting, she spent several years in the mortgage and banking industry.

Christina graduated with a Master of Accounting degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she was valedictorian. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Macalester College.

Outside of work, Christina is the vice chair of CalCPA's Economic Damages Section within Forensic Services. Christina is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Accredited in Business Valuation (ABV), a Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) and a Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist (CAMS). She has been named a Young Accountant of the Year by the International Accounting Bulletin and a Top 100 Accountant by the Los Angeles Business Journal and CalCPA. Other recognition includes the national Standing Ovation Award for up-and-coming forensic accounting professionals from AICPA's Forensic and Valuation Services Committee.

A Midwest native, Christina relocated to Pasadena in 2018 and is grateful each and every day for the beautiful weather and incredible birdwatching here in Southern California. She has loved animals all her life, and is excited to serve as Treasurer.

VISITING BEAR DIVIDE

When to see one of the West's most incredible bird migration hotspots by Jodhan Fine

Did you know there's a place in the Western San Gabriel Mountains where you can see thousands of birds migrating at eye level within a morning? If you haven't heard of it by now, let me introduce you to one of the most incredible places in all of California: Bear Divide.

Small migratory land birds typically migrate high in the atmosphere during the night, when factors like temperature, minimal predators, and celestial navigation work in their favor. Occasionally, there are unique places where you can observe birds migrating after dawn in the hundreds or thousands, illuminated by the sun and relatively low to the ground. We're lucky to have one of them—Bear Divide—nestled in the San Gabriel Mountains a little east of Santa Clarita. Mass numbers of **Warblers, Western Tanagers, Lazuli Buntings, Tyrant Flycatchers, Woodpeckers, Phainopeplas, Swifts, Swallows, Hummingbirds**, and more zip by low to the ground at viewers' waists.

Bear Divide becomes especially active from mid April to mid May, but visual migration can be observed there in small numbers as soon as late March. By the end of May, activity significantly drops off. If you're hoping to witness a signature Bear Divide day with a shot at seeing thousands of birds, plan to come during the April 20 to May 10 window. However, weather at Bear Divide is unpredictable, with foggy mornings often disrupting the ability to see birds.

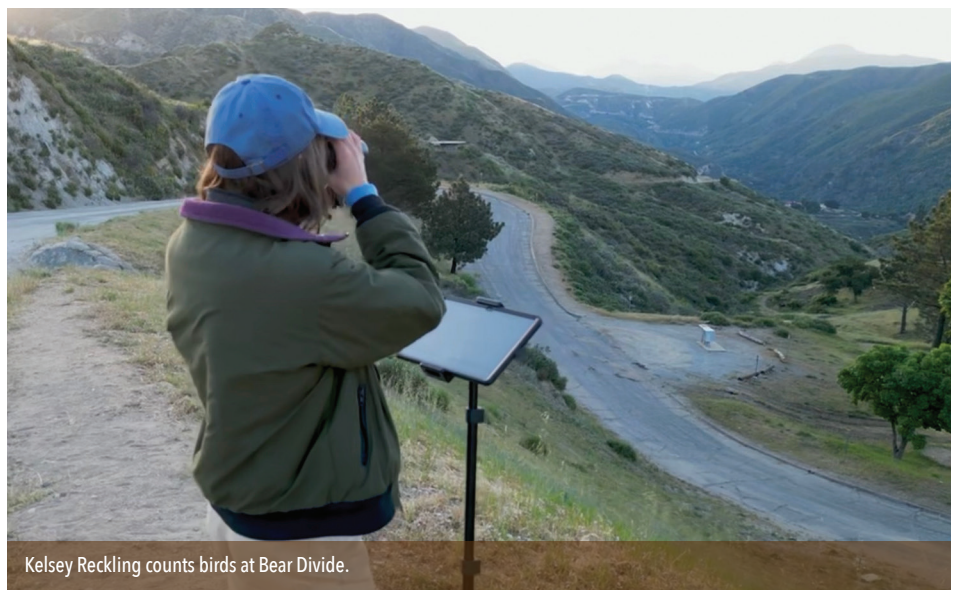


Western Tanager © Ryan Terrill

Sometimes, even sunny days are unexpectedly slow. If possible, plan multiple days to visit, in case you come on a slow day.

By helping fund bird banding and installing MOTUS towers, PAS is heavily involved with research at Bear Divide. Additionally, PAS staff member Jodhan Fine will be counting this season, his second season up there, in partnership with the Moore Lab of Zoology and former PAS Board Member Kelsey Reckling. To get to Bear Divide, take the Osborne exit off the 210, taking Little Tujunga Canyon Road up. Maps may not direct you the correct way. We hope to see you at Bear Divide this spring!

To learn more about Bear Divide and its history, check out season 2, episode 2 ("Bear Divide, Describing a New Species, and Growing up in a Legendary Birding Family with Ryan Terrill") of our podcast, "The Field Notes Podcast," wherever you get your podcasts. Or, email Jodhan at jodhanf.pas@gmail.com.



Kelsey Reckling counts birds at Bear Divide.

© Ian Davies

Recounting 80 Years of the Christmas Bird Count

by Jon Fisher

December 20, 2025, dawned mostly clear and quite mild. There was certainly no reason to complain about the weather on the Christmas Bird Count; neither too cold nor too warm. More importantly for counters, it was dry.

Sixty-five enthusiastic birders—ranging from beginners and first-time CBC participants to well-seasoned birders—took to the field to census bird numbers within our 15-mile diameter count circle.



Greater Pewee © Antonio Lopez Pardo ML651777972

HERE'S A LOOK AT THE RESULTS...

Five **Snow Geese** and two **Ross's Geese** were welcome, but the waterfowl showing was lackluster overall. Most were recorded in well below average numbers. Surprising were complete misses of **Northern Pintail** and **Green-winged Teal**. This can be indicative of a significant population trend or simply a lack of appropriate habitat in the circle that year. But over the history of the count, waterfowl numbers have dropped significantly.

Only 11 **California Quail** were found, which on the face of it is stunning. But consider that much of the habitat where this species is likely to occur goes unsurveyed on the count. There's not too much accessible chaparral, save for a few trails along foothill canyons. There was even less available this year given the Eaton Fire closures. I'd expect this number to get back to normal on future counts. Interestingly this year, **Mountain Quail** outnumbered the Californias, with 30 tallied.

In the realm of shorebirds, a lone **American Avocet** was along the Rio Hondo (Naresh Satyan). Thirty-six **Wilson's Snipe** was a good count, with 35 of these along Walnut Creek (Jon Feenstra, Alex Coffey). A single locality can really make a difference by adding one or more species to the count or producing a high number.

A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at the Livingston-Graham gravel pits on count day (Darren Dowell, John Rodgers). This species remains rare, but records are

increasing. At nearby Peck Road Water Conservation Park, a rare-for-the-count **Short-billed Gull** was spotted (Ed Stonick, Michelle Kwan).

A dozen **Neotropic Cormorants** was the second-highest number ever recorded for the count, with 17 found in 2024. This species was first recorded on the count in 2018 and has been missed only once since then. They have seen an impressive northward range expansion over the past decade.

Three **White-tailed Kites** were recorded, one at Legg Lake (Michael & Jan Long) and two at Santa Fe Dam (Jodhan Fine, et al.). A **Northern Harrier** was also spotted later in the day at Santa Fe Dam (Dowell, Rodgers). Additionally, three **Swainson's Hawks** were seen during count week in Monrovia; a nice winter record (Brian Browne).

Two **Northern Pygmy-Owls** were near Mt. Wilson (Lance Benner) and two **Long-eared Owls** (multiple observers) were recorded at Hahamongna Watershed Park for just the fifth count record. The latter species likely occurs in greater numbers than observations indicate, but they are typically secretive and often non-vocal at this time of year.

Mt. Wilson offered up a **woodpecker** bonanza, with six species recorded, including a **Williamson's Sapsucker**, 10 **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, and two **White-headed Woodpeckers** on count day (Benner).

Six species of introduced **parrots** and **parakeets** were tallied on the count. These birds remain a fascinating feature of our local avifauna, with existing populations having started with a handful of released or escaped birds over 50 years ago. A few species are now well-established breeders.

Very rare was a continuing **Greater Pewee** at Monrovia Canyon Park seen by many on count day for only the second count record. The previous bird was seen on the 2020 count.

A returning wintering **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** was tallied on count day at Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel for just the third count record (Michael Abrams). Lastly, a **Western Flycatcher** was found at Lacy Park (Rodgers).

Loggerhead Shrikes have been a bellwether species on the coastal slope, with numbers declining precipitously over recent decades. Through the 1980s, our count average was about 30 individuals. Recent counts have produced zero to two birds. In 2025 they were missed altogether.

Other notable count week birds included a **Plumbeous Vireo** and a **Northern Rough-winged Swallow**. These count week birds—easy to miss on a single count day—help paint a more complete picture of early winter avifauna in the area.



Red-tailed Tanager © Tim Avery ML652120360

What Is Christmas Bird Count?

The CBC is the longest-running bird survey in the world. It was created as an alternative to Christmas “side hunts” where participants competed to shoot as many birds as possible. Now under the National Audubon Society, the CBC has over 70,000 participants in around 2,400 counts around the world.

Swinhoe’s White-eyes made their count debut this year with three individuals recorded. This non-native from southeast Asia is rapidly increasing in number and spreading northward in the county. We can expect numbers to increase going forward.

A neat hat trick were **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and **Pygmy Nuthatch**, all recorded on count day.

Two **California Gnatcatchers** were in Montebello, where this species persists tenuously in small numbers in the extant coastal sage scrub habitat (Luke Tiller).

A **Pacific Wren** was in Big Santa Anita Canyon, where they are rare but somewhat regular (Jack Wickel), while two **Townsend’s Solitaires** were along the Mt. Wilson Trail (Benner).

Turning again to non-natives, a single **Northern Red Bishop**, 42 **Pin-tailed Whydahs**, and 14 **Scaly-breasted Munias** were found on count day.

Two **Vesper Sparrows** were at Santa Fe Dam, where they are scarce but regular in winter (Fine), but only a single **Fox Sparrow** was recorded on the count. This is another species that would likely yield much higher counts if its preferred foothill chaparral habitat received more extensive coverage.

A continuing **Hooded Oriole** was spotted at the Huntington Gardens, where one or two are almost always present in winter (Jon Fisher, Brenda Sabin).

Two **Tricolored Blackbirds** were along Walnut Creek (Feenstra, Coffey), but none were at Legg Lake, which is typically the most reliable spot in the circle.

Moving on to **wood warblers**, a **Black-and-white Warbler** continued at Peck Road Water Conservation Park (Dowell, Andrew Jacobson), two **Wilson’s Warblers** were recorded, and a **Palm Warbler** continued at Belvedere Lake Park (Jacobson). Quite rare was a continuing **Pine Warbler** seen during count week in the Whittier Narrows area (Dowell). This constitutes only the second count record, the first being in 2008.

Wrapping things up was a colorful male **Summer Tanager** by the Whittier Narrows Nature Center along with an escaped **Red-crested Cardinal** (Taylor Paez).

It’s worth noting that 8% of the species we recorded were non-natives. Thirteen species represent vagrants: birds out of range or present at the wrong time of year. Eighteen species — 11% of the total — were represented by only a single individual.



Red-tailed Hawk © Alicia Di Rado

WHY THE CBC MATTERS FOR BIRDS

Our count now spans 80 years of tracking bird numbers in the San Gabriel Valley and surrounding areas. All count data helps create a picture of bird life and population trends locally.

As members of the public (as opposed to scientists or researchers), birders are in a rather unique position. By participating in projects like the CBC and entering their sightings into eBird throughout the year, they’re able to make meaningful contributions to the scientific record.

Observers in the field are critical in monitoring population trends, which is essential for conservation efforts. Field work by birders is helping scientists and policymakers make informed decisions that can help preserve birds, habitats, and other wildlife. That’s just one great reason to get involved in the CBC.

As always, a big thank-you to everyone who joined the count. This event is only possible with your participation. I’m grateful for that and for the efforts of Pasadena Audubon, which has generated interest and increased turnout.

The 2026 CBC will take place on December 19. Hope to see all of you there!

Jon Fisher has been coordinating the Christmas Bird Count since 1992. He compiles the weekly Los Angeles Rare Bird Alert and authors a column for the Los Angeles Audubon Society newsletter, the *Western Tanager*.

CBC 2025 in Numbers

16,249

Individual Birds

Participants 65

Notable misses Northern Pintail & Green-winged Teal

Rarities Greater Pewee, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Pine Warbler

167

Total species

BIRDATHON RETURNS, APRIL 25-26, 2026

Birdathon is back! After a brief hiatus in 2025, Pasadena Audubon Society is excited to bring back this beloved spring tradition April 25 to 26. Birdathon combines the excitement of peak spring migration with the enthusiasm and creativity of local birders—all in support of PAS programs and conservation efforts. Birdathon puts the FUN in fundraiser, but the “d” is not silent.

There are many ways to take part, and we hope you'll join the fun. At its heart, Birdathon is simple: birders form teams, count birds, and invite supporters to sponsor their efforts. But each team puts its own spin on the experience. Some groups set out to find as many bird species as possible in a single day. Others take a more relaxed approach—enjoying a morning of birding with friends while tallying species along the way. However you participate, Birdathon is a chance to celebrate the birdiest time of year and reconnect with what makes birding so rewarding.

Those looking to join one of these teams should do so between now and April 17. Self-sponsorship of all team members is expected. Birders are welcome to form a team (or bird solo!) at any time. Each team will choose a 24-hour window during the Birdathon period—April 25 through April 26—to count bird species. The effort doesn't have to last a full 24 hours; even a few hours of birding can make for a great Birdathon outing.

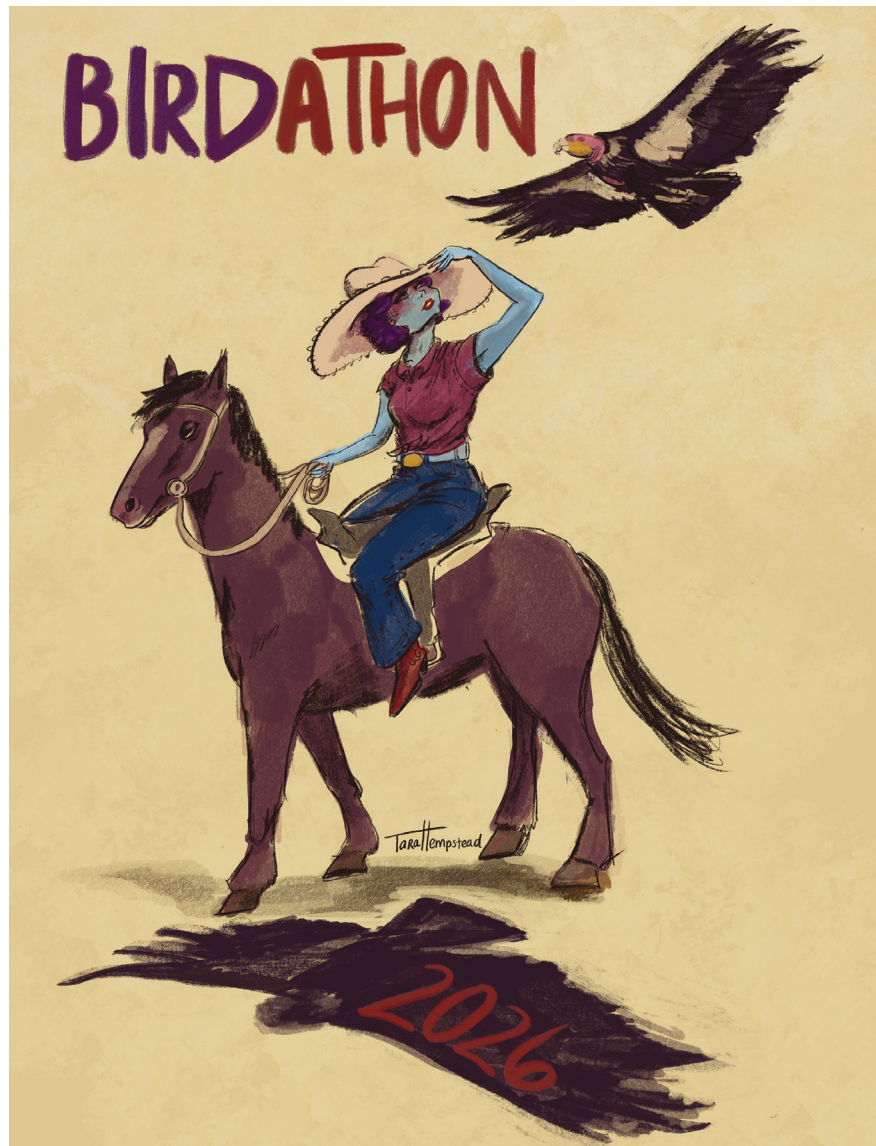
Strategy and creativity are encouraged. Teams often develop a theme or challenge to make their effort more engaging for supporters. Sponsors can pledge donations based on the number of species a team finds—often in dollars per bird—but teams are welcome to come up with their own fundraising ideas.

After the Birdathon weekend, teams will report their results and collect pledges. All funds raised support Pasadena Audubon Society programs, including the Bird Science Program in local schools, *The Wrentit* newsletter, the MOTUS tracking station, research grants, monthly programs, and the Young Birders Club.

Whether you form a team, join one, or simply sponsor a birder, Birdathon is a wonderful way to celebrate birds while supporting PAS.

If you're thinking of forming a team, please email Jared and Carl at jaredn.pas@gmail.com and carlfn.pas@gmail.com. Include your point of contact and team sponsor when you reach out.

To more about Birdathon and to find a team to join, visit <https://www.pasadenaaudubon.org/birdathon>



Tara Hempstead is a writer, illustrator, and violinist. She also runs Celebirdy Bird Tours, a SoCal creative birding guide. Check out her work at www.tarahempstead.com, celebirdybirdtours.substack.com, and on Instagram: [popt_art](https://www.instagram.com/popt_art)

INTERESTED IN FORMING A TEAM? SOME IDEAS TO INSPIRE YOU:

- A no-holds-barred effort to see as many species as possible in one day
- Strategic placement of lawn chairs to see as many species as possible without walking a single step
- Birding route devised to have margaritas at the final destination
- A day of birding done entirely by foot
- Count only photographed species
- A full morning at your very favorite place to bird



Discovering a Love for Birds

by Sophia Shafer-Wharton, 18 years old

My first experiences with bird watching from my earlier childhood were frustrating and uninspiring to say the least. I couldn't figure out how to focus the binoculars, the birds kept flying away, and frankly, I didn't see what was so interesting about all those small brown birds. My grandpa was a recreational birder back then and would take me out on walks near my hometown of Mountain View, California, attempting to spark a similar passion in me, but I didn't get the bug, you could call it, for birding until last spring.

As I was preparing to apply to colleges, my parents and I did a driving tour of the Pacific Northwest to look at schools and see a few national parks along the way. At Mount Rainier in Washington, there was a blanket of snow covering every inch of ground, not a place one would expect to see any sort of life, or so I thought. We were hiking on a deserted trail in our snowshoes when my mom called me over and said, "There's a ptarmigan!" I probably couldn't identify more than 20 species at the time, but I knew about ptarmigans and had always dreamed of seeing one, so randomly stumbling across one was truly remarkable. And so I decided to download Merlin ID to record my observations.

This didn't immediately spark my love for avian life, but I do believe this was the beginning. What fully solidified this passion was my family's trip to Alaska in early summer. The primary purpose was not birding, though we had pre-scheduled a boat tour through Kenai Fjords National Park, which I learned would be a great opportunity to view sea birds. My good friend from school has been bird watching for years, and I had always hoped to be able to gain his same passion. So I thought to myself, "If I am ever going to start recording the birds I see, it might as well be now." And that was that. I became officially indoctrinated into the cult of bird watching overnight.

On my most recent major birding excursion, I traveled to the Southwest in order to see both some new national parks and also birds. This was the first bird-related trip I had planned since becoming interested in avian creatures, so I did some research beforehand to prepare myself for the new species in these areas. Now, late December in Arizona and New Mexico are



Sophia Shafer-Wharton has caught the birding bug. She is shown here birding in Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico and outside Anchorage, Alaska.



far from peak birding conditions, but I still saw so many species I had never even heard of before, from Rivoli's Hummingbirds to the Pyrrhuloxia, a close relative of the Northern Cardinal.

I have long debated what I should go to school for in college (which I will begin next fall), but have always felt compelled toward the environmental and biological sciences. And now that I have found my love of birds, I wonder if doing ornithological research would be possible in my future. Especially through the classes with Young Birders Club at Pasadena Audubon, like seeing Occidental College's collection of bird specimens, I feel like this might be something I pursue further. I am excited to see how birds continue to feature themselves in my life, either recreationally or professionally!

Upcoming Young Birders Club Field Trips

Want to discover your own love for birds? Students can join the Young Birders Club for our upcoming field trips this spring:

APRIL 18 - FIELD TRIP Hansen Dam – Enjoy early migratory bird diversity.

MAY 2 - FIELD TRIP Bear Divide – Watch the magic of migration in real time as migratory birds fly over our heads.

Learn more at <https://www.pasadenaaudubon.org/youngbirders>

Conservation and Advocacy in Action

A variety of PAS activities are underway for 2026 by Dave Weeshoff, PAS Conservation Chair

Climate Resilience Environmental Education Center

On February 27, 2026, after a four-year advocacy effort by six non-profit organizations (including Pasadena Audubon), a comprehensive, 112-page response was submitted to the City of Pasadena's request for proposal for the Climate Resilience Environmental Education Center (CREEC).



The CREEC will be located at the northwestern area of the Hahamonga Watershed Park and will be (quoting from the Proposal) "a place where all people of Pasadena will be connected to the natural treasures of the Arroyo Seco and be offered the skills to steward it.

"CREEC is an expert-guided, multicultural, community-constructed conservation education center. Led by the nation's oldest environmental justice non-profit and managed by a coalition of community-based organizations dedicated to principles of inclusion, equity, collective growth, and creativity, CREEC will provide new opportunities for the community of Pasadena.

At its core, CREEC is an act of hope and an investment into a future that is equitable, sustainable, and joyful.

The proposal includes a comprehensive 10-year plan as requested. We look forward to the City's favorable reply and resultant contract. To our knowledge there are no other qualified bidders. Outward Bound Adventures (OBA) is the Lead Managing Organization and Pasadena Audubon will be one of five non-profits that comprise the Management Advisory Board.

PDF copies of the CREEC RFP and the OBA RFP Response, as well as detailed historical documents, are available upon request from Dave Weeshoff (see below).

California Wildlife Corridor Working Group

By invitation, Pasadena Audubon is joining over 40 organizations working to protect and

advance wildlife corridors across California through advocacy and providing solutions. This includes improvements to habitat connectivity, reduction of wildlife-vehicle collisions, protection of threatened and endangered species, reduction of habitat fragmentation, and protection of biodiversity.

L.A. County General Plan: Conservation and Natural Resources Element Update

In 2026 the L.A. County Planning Department will update their 2035 General Plan to comply with California SB 1425 and AB 1889 to ensure youth perspectives are reflected, shape policies that balance growth with conservation, and inform how open space, climate resilience, and equity are addressed across the County. Pasadena Audubon will participate in these discussions with emphasis on supporting our Mission Statement regarding education, recreation, and conservation.

Arroyo Seco Water Reuse and Descanso Gardens Lake Improvement Projects

Pasadena Audubon continues to monitor these local projects through their planning, documentation preparation, environmental

impact reports, public comment, and construction phases.

As funded and directed by the Safe Clean Water Program (County Measure W) the two projects are under development to achieve stormwater quality improvements, habitat restoration, community and recreational benefits, and sustainable stormwater management, utilizing nature-based solutions.

Catio Tour

For a third year, Pasadena Audubon will be supporting the Los Angeles Catio Tour on Saturday, October 17. The Tour will provide the opportunity to visit multiple homes with a catio (cat patio) that provides a customized annex for house cats to enjoy the outdoors in a protected environment for the safety and security of cats as well as our local birds, winged insects, and small mammals.

Since outdoor cats kill many millions of birds every year, this is one approach to protect our feathered (and small furry) friends—keep cats indoors. Save the date and watch our various communication channels for further details.

As usual, if you have any questions or comments, please contact me, any time, any day. weeshoff@sbcglobal.net and (818) 618-1652



SOCIAL BIRDERS

Words and photos by Sean Doorly

Birders gathered on Wednesday, February 25, at Wild Parrot Brewing Company for our monthly Birds & Beers meetup. This month's gathering included a creative twist as members shared bird-themed poetry. The readings were thoughtful and funny, and a reminder that birds inspire more than just checklists. Birds & Beers meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month, and everyone is welcome.

Birds & Beers

A few days later, 14 members of the Pan African Students Association (PASA) at Occidental College joined Helin Jung and Darren Dowell for a habitat restoration project at Hahamongna Watershed Park on Saturday, February 28. Despite a hot day, the group spent the morning improving habitat in this important local green space. Located at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, Hahamongna provides valuable habitat for both resident and migrating birds, and volunteer efforts like this help keep the watershed healthy.

The weekend wrapped up with a field trip from the Pasadena Audubon Young Birders Club, which visited the San Gabriel River Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera on Sunday, March 1. The trip was led by Jodhan Fine and Omar Alui, who guided the group through this great birding spot. Highlights included a **Tropical Kingbird**, along with **Blue-winged Teal**, **Ruddy Duck**, an **American Kestrel**, **American Pipit**, and **Spotted Sandpiper**, among many others.



Emily Allen, Tom Mills, Catherine Hamilton, Mary Angel, and Merrilee Fellows



Everyone is all ears as Carl Matthies shares his bird-inspired poetry.



Jared Nigro, Carl Matthies, and Jodhan Fine are all smiles

Hahamongna Restoration



PASA photo.

Pan African Students Association (PASA) volunteers at Hahamongna.



Helin Jung photo.

PASA volunteers find a little shade on a hot day.

Young Birders



Young birders brave the heat for the birds.



Jodhan Fine leads the way.



Young Birder Oscar scans the water for birds.

Bird Science Program Springs Back to Life

After a fall hiatus, the Bird Science Program returned to a full slate at three PUSD schools this spring

Words and photos by Helin Jung

When I joined the Pasadena Audubon Society staff in November 2025 as the director of the Bird Science Program, I knew I had big shoes to fill. But it wasn't until the work got going in earnest earlier this year that I found out how enormous those shoes were.

BSP, which was developed in 2018 by former PAS Executive Director Lois Brunet, my predecessor Kathy Degner, Vicky Salmon, and Laura Solomon, officially launched at two Pasadena Unified School District Title I elementary schools in 2019 with the goal of fulfilling the PAS mission of bringing the excitement of birds to the community through education.

The program provided students with classroom lessons, birding field trips, and close interactions with live raptors. The eventual goal was to expand it to become a network with neighboring Audubon chapters to serve more schools.

Since the program's inception, BSP's fate has been inextricably linked with that of PUSD. When the Covid-19 pandemic radically changed the nature of schooling, BSP had to adapt to the remote-learning environment. The Eaton Fire, ICE raids, and continued declines in student enrollment have brought more turmoil to the beleaguered district.

It doesn't end there. The district is staring down \$24.5 million in budget cuts, a \$31 million budget deficit, and layoffs of 160 staff members, including the elimination of dedicated science teacher positions at its STEM schools—the very teachers who have been with BSP from the beginning.

That reality has made the BSP and garden education at Washington Elementary STEM Magnet (WESM) seem all the more urgent. While past setbacks have meant BSP had to follow suit by rolling back, the inverse has been true in 2026. More classes and events, like Community Engagement Liaison Jodhan Fine's Birding at Recess, have been scheduled than ever before.



Jackson Elementary TK students get the thrill of their lives while watching a hawk fly across the auditorium.

IN THE CLASSROOM

BSP is back this year in three PUSD Title I schools—WESM, Jackson Elementary, and Madison Elementary—and serving grades TK through 5th. All three schools expressed an appreciation for the program based on past experiences.

Prior to the start of BSP classroom visits, I collaborated with Garden Educator Alexi Bolton on a lesson about birds and nesting. Alexi is a beloved fixture at WESM, and the co-teaching opportunity also served as an introduction to a new BSP face.

The first official classes were with Transitional Kindergartners at Jackson. Talk about a friendly audience. All I had to do was ask them to name parts of a bird and they wanted to give me a group hug.

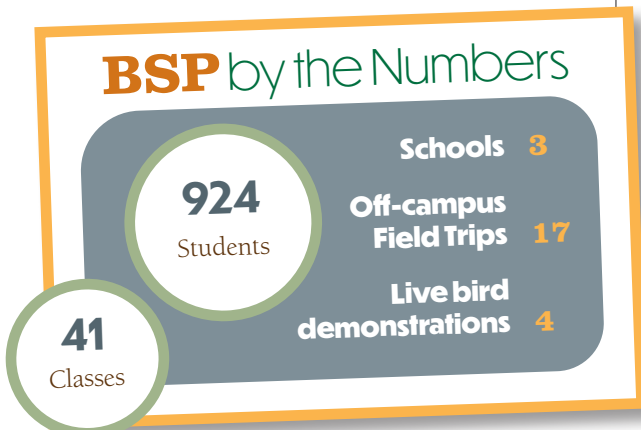
From learning about the shapes and uses of different bird beaks to prying apart an owl pellet, the lessons were designed to give students the most engaging experiences possible. Judging by the often raucous responses to the activities, and the greetings we get upon entering the classrooms, we seem to have done OK.

IN THE FIELD

When it comes to learning about birds, nothing beats being outside. This year, field trips have been scheduled at Hahamongna Watershed Park and the Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy's Rosemont Preserve. A wonderful group of experienced docents has chipped in to help lead the field trips.

In a massive stroke of luck, a Great Horned Owl posted up in very visible spots on six consecutive field trips to Hahamongna, meaning that several hundred students were able to see one in the wild, most of them for the first time.

The students' energies shift markedly when they're in nature. There is a freedom to the way they move beneath the oak trees that they don't have on their school campuses. They feel enormous pride when they're the ones to first spot something interesting. They exclaim adorable things like, "It has a



What could be so interesting that everybody stopped to look on a field trip to Hahamongna Watershed Park? None other than a Great Horned Owl!



rainbow head!” upon seeing the bright pink gorget of a male Anna’s Hummingbird.

A trio of Black fourth-grade boys stayed next to me at the front of the pack on one of the Hahamongna trips. One of them said that it reminded him of going to Eaton Canyon on hikes with his family. Another added that he had done that too, with his older brother. They used to go up to the waterfall together. What they did not have to say is what made their happiness in that moment all the more heartbreaking.

THE FUTURE OF BSP

There have been some exhilarating moments from this spring run. Watching a tween girl go from being deeply unimpressed to squealing with childlike glee over a bird feels like witnessing an actual miracle.

But, as is the case with many community-led projects borne out of love, BSP has depended on the sacrifices of its contributors. My goal for the program is to determine how to healthily sustain it by addressing the most challenging aspects of its operation, many of which are logistical. If you’re interested in learning more about the program, you can reach me at helinj.pas@gmail.com.

► A Note of Gratitude

Many thanks to Kathy Degner, who has been the vital core of the Bird Science Program since its inception in 2018. She was there before the program’s launch, helping create BSP as a volunteer.



Mary Angel photo

She continued to steer it as the director until summer 2025. While bobbing and weaving in the face of many challenges, Kathy stayed steadfast in her dedication to youth science education, serving thousands of students and community members along the way. Thank you so much for all your incredible work, Kathy!

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Black-crowned Night Heron
& Western Gull © Kristin Kanjo



Brown Pelican © Patrick Walling

Easy birding in Newport Beach
at the Pier and Dory Fishing
Market in early March.