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PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY, FOUNDED 1904 | **VOLUME 75 · NO. 2** | NOVEMBER 2026-JANUARY 2027



Pinyon Jay © Kathleen Waldron ML665923806

president's perch

Getting Better at Birding

By Emily Allen, PAS Acting President

Greetings PAS members! I've agreed to step up as Acting President of the Board of Pasadena Audubon Society, as we search for the next President. I've been on the Board for three years, serving as Membership Chair and as an At-Large member. Prior to my retirement in Aug 2022, I served as Dean of the College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology at Cal State Los Angeles. What's the connection to PAS? Well, there were a lot of birds on campus, especially very noisy ravens in a Ficus tree outside my office window. But more seriously, the connection is that I have a passion for education, and I have experience in administration and organizational development. So I will try to bring these skills to the Board and help PAS move ahead into our next phase. Our Board and membership include many people with much more birding knowledge than me. But I do believe that we can all keep learning, and that is what excites me about birding—I'm always improving my skills at identifying birds and understanding why they are where they are and why they do what they do!

On a personal level, I recently took a four-day birding trip to Southeastern Arizona with some birding friends. I expected to see some fall migrants, but it was a bit quiet at Madera Canyon and some desert areas. But I improved my ability to differentiate between female Hepatic, Summer, and Western Tanagers, and saw both my first Gray Warbler and my first Rufous-winged Sparrow at the Desert Meadow Garden in Green Valley. There were a lot of Verdins in the scrubby mesquite areas we birded, and despite it being October, I saw a Verdin carrying a large twig in its beak, and the next day observed a pair flying in and out of a seemingly very large nest (for such a small bird). After looking at Cornell's All About Birds site, I discovered that Verdins continue their nest building activities all year, using the nest for roosting to stay out of the cold and the heat even after their young fledge. Apparently they are known for their architecturally complex homes!

Some of the activities coming up at PAS are our usual fall field trips and of course the Christmas Bird Count on December 19. If you get this before election day, we suggest you vote No on Prop 45, which is designed to dismantle California's bedrock environmental protection law—the California Environmental Quality Act.

The most important piece of news coming up is that the Board has voted to recommend to the membership that we change our name from Pasadena Audubon Society to Pasadena Bird Alliance to better reflect our mission, values, and inclusive approach to birding and bird conservation. This would put us in the company of at least 15% of the nation's Audubon chapters that have taken similar steps as a result of the larger-scale acknowledgement in the modern era of John James Audubon's racist behavior and values. More information will be coming to you soon, including about the voting process.

I look forward to meeting more of you on field trips, at our program evenings, and of course at Birds and Beers!



Summer Tanager © Emily Allen

November Chapter Meeting

▶ WEDNESDAY, 11/18 7:00-8:30pm - on Zoom

NOTE: The vote to change the organization's name from Pasadena Audubon Society to Pasadena Bird Alliance will take place at this meeting. Details below.

Chapter meetings updates at www.pasadenaaudubon.org/meetings

Free Bird Walks

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

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

Social

▶ FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18 & WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

Birds & Beers 5:00-8:00pm

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

We'll take a break from Birds & Beers in November for Thanksgiving, but in **December we will be back on FRIDAY, Dec. 18** for a cup of good cheer and our 3rd Annual Snowy Albatross Gift Exchange! Bring 1-2 charming, chintzy, but not extravagant avian-themed items (no need to wrap them). And don't forget: Wild Parrot donates $1 per pint to PAS!

Upcoming PAS Board Meetings

▶ NOVEMBER 10, DECEMBER 8, JANUARY 12 7:00-9:00pm

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

Christmas Bird Count

Join Pasadena Audubon for the 81st annual community bird count, part of the nation's oldest citizen science project. All experience levels are welcome. The orientation meeting will explain the history, the methods, and assign count areas for those who wish to count alone or with others. Read all about it on page 4.

CBC Save the Dates

▶ **Orientation Meeting** WEDNESDAY, DEC. 9 7:00-8:00pm
in person at PAS headquarters, 75 S. Grand Ave., Pasadena

▶ **Count Day** SATURDAY, DEC. 19 12:01am-11:59pm

▶ **Post-count Dinner** SATURDAY, DEC. 19 6:30-8:30pm
at El Torito, 3333 E. Foothilll Blvd., Pasadena. Cost: $40 per person, which includes a complimentary holiday margarita.



A Focus on Education This Fall

by Jared Nigro, PAS Executive Director

Pasadena Audubon Society kicked off this autumn with a bang. The 12-week intensive Master Birders program began in early September, with one class and one field trip per week. The class opened with a lesson on the evolution of birds from dinosaurs, so you can see we're thoroughly covering the topic.

In addition to Master Birders, Mickey Long and Jon Fisher hosted their annual Bird ID Quiz at the Audubon Center in Debs Park. This is a great refresher on the birds you'll see in our area. During the event, Mickey and Jon spoke about their birding journeys from the beginning until now. I'm always so impressed to hear about the time and repetition it took them both to gain their keenly perceptive eyes and ears. I take their skill set for granted now, so it is always a wonderful reminder that birding is all about doing it a lot and staying curious.

Our student education programs are also commencing. Alexi Bolton, our Garden Educator at Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School, will begin teaching this year's student body about California native plants, while Jodhan Fine will teach the Bird Science Program. Overall, we'll be instructing a little over 500 students this year.

Lastly, the Gottlieb Native Garden at Old Marengo Park is well underway. The garden was planted on the mornings of Friday, October 23 as well as Friday, October 30. If you were unable to make the planting days in October, we'll be assembling a small team of GNG stewards to maintain the garden moving forward. If you're interested in helping reshape this Altadena park back into a thriving garden, please contact me, Jared Nigro, to volunteer: *jaredn.pas@gmail.com*.



Gottlieb Native Garden at Old Marengo Park.

PROPOSED NAME CHANGE FOR PASADENA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Earlier this year, the Pasadena Audubon Society Board of Directors voted to recommend to the membership that the organization change its name from Pasadena Audubon Society to Pasadena Bird Alliance.

The Board believes this name change will better reflect the organization's mission, values, and inclusive approach to birding and bird conservation. At least 15% of the nation's Audubon chapters have taken similar actions, including some neighboring groups (San Diego Bird Alliance, Pomona Valley Bird Alliance).

While John James Audubon helped inspire generations of birders and environmental stewards, this proposed path forward expands on the legacy he created while also acknowledging his racist values and behaviors and working toward a more inclusive future. Birding is for everyone and we need everyone to help save the birds.

Ultimately, this name change cannot happen without membership approval. The vote to change the name of the Pasadena Audubon Society to the Pasadena Bird Alliance will be held at the PAS General Meeting on Wednesday, November 18, 2026, from 7 to 8:30pm. **Details on the voting process and how to join the meeting will be forthcoming via email.**

Please feel free to email any questions to PAS Executive Director Jared Nigro at *jaredn.pas@gmail.com*.

A FALL IRRUPTION IS UNDERWAY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and other conifer-dependent birds are moving through Southern California in unusually high numbers this fall.

Since mid-September, birders have reported **Pinyon Jays** across mountains, foothills, and desert margins, while **Clark's Nutcrackers** have appeared in places where they are normally scarce. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** have been widespread in the lowlands. **Evening Grosbeaks** have been documented from Santa Barbara County through Los Angeles and San Diego counties, with **Cassin's Finches** also reported outside their usual range.

This is an irruption: a large-scale, often irregular movement beyond a species' typical distribution. Irruptions are frequently linked to changes in food availability. When seed crops are poor—or when a successful breeding season produces more birds than local resources can support—birds may disperse in search of food. Weather and climate can influence the production of cones and seeds, while local conditions determine how much food remains available through fall and winter.

Pinyon Jays have been especially conspicuous in Southern California, appearing from the mountains and desert edge to unexpected coastal locations. Their fall abundance is notable because the species has declined by roughly two-thirds since 1967, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

Evening Grosbeaks have been documented at Barley Flat, Jackson Lake, Charlton Flat, Mount Gleason, Mount Wilson, and Table Mountain in the San Gabriel Mountains. They have also been reported at La Cumbre Peak in Santa Barbara County, in Los Padres National Forest in Ventura County, and in the Laguna Mountains of San Diego County.



Left: *Clark's Nutcracker* © Kevin Nijdam-Jones ML665888922
Below: *Pinyon Jay* © Kathleen Waldron ML665923806

Left: *Red-breasted Nuthatch* © Linda & Nick Molatore ML666042870
Above: *Evening Grosbeak* © John Davis ML665863167

A 1972 Comparison

The current movement has parallels with 1972, another major Southern California irruption year. In his fall season report in "American Birds," Guy McCaskie described large numbers of Pinyon Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers outside their usual ranges, along with a "massive flight" of Red-breasted Nuthatches. Evening Grosbeaks were exceptionally numerous in the eastern part of the region, with some reaching the coast. Red Crossbills, Purple and Cassin's Finches, and Varied Thrushes were also involved. The 1972 movement was relatively short-lived, with much of the influx fading by December.

This year, Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, and Red-breasted Nuthatches appear to be the strongest components so far. Evening Grosbeaks have been documented across several mountain ranges, while Red Crossbills remain relatively scarce. Whether this irruption follows the trajectory of 1972—or persists into winter—will depend in part on where birds continue to find adequate food.

What Happens Next?

An irruption does not necessarily follow a predictable path. As birds move through the region, their distribution will depend in part on where food remains available. Some may continue south or toward the coast; others may settle where they find sufficient resources. If food conditions improve or populations return to their usual ranges, the movement may diminish as quickly as it began.

That makes the coming months particularly informative. The distribution of these birds can provide a picture of how species respond to changing resource conditions across the region. Comparing this fall's records with previous irruption years may also reveal whether similar species respond in similar ways—or whether each species follows its own pattern.

For Southern California birders, this is more than an unusual influx of birds. It is a chance to observe, in real time, how changes in food resources and population dynamics can reshape where birds occur across the landscape.

Get Ready for the 2026 Annual Christmas Bird Count

by Jon Fisher

The year 2027 is rushing toward us, but there's one thing more to do before Christmas and the New Year. And that is to conduct the Pasadena Christmas Bird Count (CBC) of course! The Pasadena-San Gabriel Valley count began in 1946, and this year will mark its 81st anniversary.

The 2026 count will take place on Saturday, December 19. If you're new to birding or just new to Christmas Bird Counts, this is a great opportunity to learn more about the winter avifauna of the greater San Gabriel Valley area and to meet others who share an interest in birds.

This event is truly a highlight of the year, and I know I'm not alone in that sentiment. The Pasadena count is especially close to me as this is my 35th year as coordinator and compiler. The count gathers local birders of all levels not only to have fun birding but, more importantly, to make a worthwhile contribution to science.

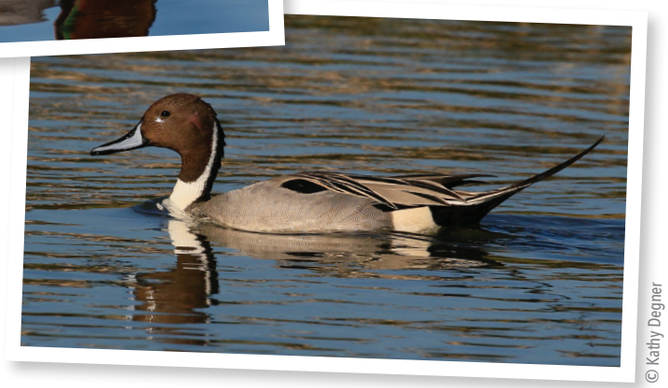
▶ The Christmas Bird Count began as a more conservation-minded alternative to traditional Christmas "side hunts," where participants competed to shoot as many birds as possible. Today, birders spread out across designated areas to identify and tally every bird they see or hear, contributing valuable data on bird populations and distribution.

The center of the Pasadena 15-mile diameter count area is the intersection of San Gabriel Boulevard and Duarte Road. We're fortunate to have a diversity of habitats in the circle, and this is a major reason we regularly record over 160 species each year; and sometimes over 170. Another reason is the number of dedicated volunteers that census birds year after year.

Over the count's history, some bird numbers have remained stable, some have increased, and others have declined. Introduced species, climate change, range expansions, and habitat loss are some of the factors behind these changes. Our CBC data tracks all these trends.

If you're familiar with Eurasian Collared-Doves, Neotropic Cormorants, and Scaly-breasted Munias (increasing), Spotted Doves (extirpated), and Loggerhead Shrikes (declining) and our non-native parrots and parakeets (many are now well-established), you're already aware of some of these trends.


© Luke Tiller


© Kathy Degner

Have you seen these birds? Green-winged Teal (left) and Northern Pintail (below) were missing from our CBC 2025.

One intriguing aspect of the count is that each year is different; sometimes just a little, sometimes a lot. This year's count has interesting potential. Mid-September saw an irruption of several species, both locally and throughout much of the west. These included Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Evening Grosbeaks.

These are all species that rely on seeds for food, particularly in the fall and winter months. What typically drives these dispersions is the failure of these seed crops in the species' normal range. We already had above average reports of these birds in the county in September and we'll have to see if the irruptions fizzle out or continue, and to what degree.

If previous counts are any guide, we'll certainly have a few unusual birds; some known ahead of time and some discovered on count day. An impressive number of rare birds (vagrants) have been recorded on the count over the years. And as always, there will be the usual array of expected species.

On count day we'll record every bird that participants identify by sight or sound within the circle boundary. This will produce a snapshot of early winter birdlife in the San Gabriel Valley and surrounding areas, with over 280 different species recorded during the count's history. CBCs are an important part of citizen science and help track distribution and population trends of resident and wintering birds.

We'll hold the usual pre-count meeting in person on Wednesday, December 9, from 7 to 8 pm at PAS headquarters at 75 S. Grand Ave, Pasadena. At this meeting we'll present an overview of the Christmas Bird Count, talk about its history, and discuss methods and procedures. We will also cover some identification challenges and what birds to expect on the count. Lastly, we'll get a jump on assigning count areas for those who wish to count alone or with others.

If you're new to the count and want to join other participants on count day, this meeting is a great place to meet others and decide where to count. Can't make the meeting? Not to worry. It's easy to match counters with locations via e-mail.

And be sure not to miss the traditional post-count dinner and wrap-up on count night, this year at taco bar El Torito in Pasadena. Not only will there be a nice meal after a long day in the field, but you'll be among the first to find out what good birds were found and how many species were tallied. The dinner will also feature an always-fun slide show featuring photos of participants and birds—both common and rare—from count day.

For more information, contact count coordinator Jon Fisher at *JonF60@hotmail.com*.

THE LEGEND OF THE CALIFORNIA CONDORS

Words and photos by Shuxing (Miles) Wang

A huge shadow soars over the magnificent Bitter Creek canyon. It circles slowly above me, quietly searching the hills below. It is a California Condor.

As I watched the condor circle above me, I thought back to the previous spring. On the second day of our road trip to Monterey during last spring break, we visited Pinnacles National Park, famous for its California Condors.

The first condor of the day was seen right away at the visitor center, but we still hiked up the Condor Gulch Trail to get better views. We met a birder who had just seen a few condors and gave us the location of his sighting. Soon, we got to the place he mentioned and saw quite a few condors, and thought it was the best viewing point.

When it was time to head back, we decided to go another way. Soon, we found ourselves getting closer to the peaks, and some people were climbing it. We thought they were just climbing it for fun, but soon we found out that it was not optional at all: We must do it too. It was the famous "steep and narrow section."

After climbing this difficult section, we reached a high flat point, and a California Condor was sitting just a few feet in front of us, and a perfectly full-grown adult was sitting in a cave right underneath us. More condors kept hovering over us. The condors in the sky above kept changing frequently. Unbelievable! It was such a fantastic place to go and definitely worth the climb.

After watching them for a long time, the California Condors over our heads dropped down and so many other condors started to join them—like all the California Condors of the world were coming to meet us. Then they started to perch all around us, and suddenly we were surrounded by condors, not knowing where to look and where to point our camera.

They fought to get to higher rocks and trees, and they were gliding so close to us that we could even feel their enormous bodies moving around. It was just breathtaking and so amazing! Finally, condors had covered every single rock around us and even several trees. This was really one of the best birding experiences I've ever had. As we climbed downhill, we found that they were all roosting on some trees below where we had just been, hiding from the rain.

Seeing all those California Condors hopping and swooping, it is hard to imagine that they were once on the brink of extinction. By 1987, only 22 California Condors remained in the wild. They lived right at the sign at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, where I am standing now. The last wild birds were brought into captivity for an emergency breeding program.





California Condors at Pinnacles National Park.

From those 22 birds, the population slowly began to recover, though challenges remain, and they are now free-flying in several areas, including Central and Southern California, Northern Baja California, Arizona, Utah, and recently at Redwood National Park. As of 2022, there were 347 California Condors in the wild, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Now, standing at Bitter Creek and thinking back to Pinnacles, it is hard to believe how all those California Condors around me have grown from a lone flock of just 22 birds to persisting in the canyon in front of me. Seeing them thriving in the wild makes the story of their recovery feel real to me, not just a story in books. It made me realize just how remarkable it is that they are still here.

Checking in on the California Bird Atlas

by Lance Benner

The California Bird Atlas is a five-year survey from 2026 to 2030 to answer the following question: Which bird species breed in California and where are they?

To do this, the state has been divided into about 16,500 rectangles (also known as blocks) about three miles on a side, and of those, 434 are in Los Angeles County. Broadly speaking, the goal is to find the strongest evidence for breeding of as many species as possible in each of the Atlas blocks across the state.

The Atlas blocks were created from the U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' topographic quadrangles. Each quadrangle was divided into six rectangles that are the same as the ones used in the 1990s Atlas (except for a few along the edges of the county). The blocks have names adopted from the topo maps such as "Mount Wilson" or "Pasadena" and are arranged as follows: NW = northwest, NE = northeast, CW = center west, CE = center east, SW = southwest, and SE = southeast.

Data entry is being done with a dedicated eBird portal created specifically for the California Bird Atlas. This portal is available online at: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/home*

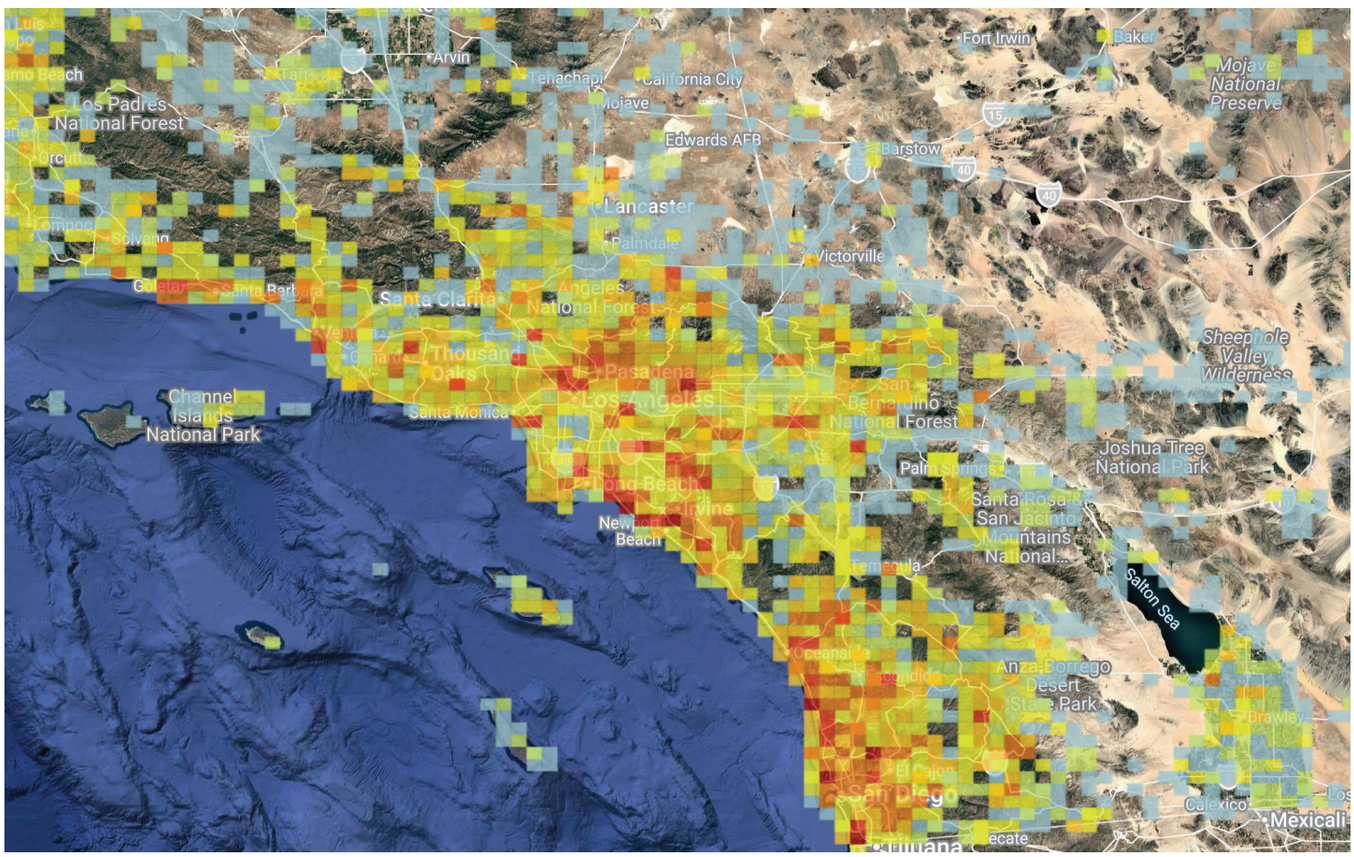
This is a major community science effort that involves thousands of volunteer birders and professional biologists.

The Background of the California Bird Atlas

Locally, the current Atlas follows the highly-successful "Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas" conducted by hundreds of birders between 1995 to 1999 and authored by Larry W. Allen, Kimball L. Garrett, and Mark C. Wimer (2016). Many Pasadena Audubon Society members contributed to the 1990s county Bird Atlas and even more are already contributing to the 2026 to 2030 statewide Atlas. The first Los Angeles County Atlas written by Allen et al. is one of the most thorough and rigorous in the country and set a very high standard for the new Atlas to follow.

Following some preliminary discussions by email and an informal meeting at Larry Allen's house in 2023, the California Bird Atlas was organized primarily by Van Pierszalowski (executive director), Morgan Tingley (chair, science advisory committee), and Sam Safran (science director). Other key members of the team include Justyn Stahl (review coordinator, Southern California), Megan Jankowski (review coordinator, Northern California), Alecia Smith (outreach coordinator), 11 science advisory committee members, six board of directors members, and about 60 regional coordinators. In Los Angeles County there are currently two regional coordinators: Jon Fisher and Lance Benner. It is possible that additional county coordinators may join the team in the future. Pasadena Audubon Society is one of the founding financial partners for the California Bird Atlas.

This figure shows California Bird Atlas effort so far. Red indicates blocks with the most species recorded (>80) and blue indicates the fewest (<10). Areas that are not colored have no Atlas data.



Finding Evidence of Breeding Birds

Contributing to the California Bird Atlas is similar to "regular" birding, but finding evidence of breeding is one of the major goals, so it's important to use eBird's breeding codes. I find that I have slowed down a lot and spend much more time observing birds to see what they're doing and to check for evidence of breeding.

For example, during the spring I was scouring my yard to look for birds carrying nesting material, carrying food, looking for recent fledglings, and looking and listening for nests. I was able to confirm about 10 species and was very surprised by the extensive nesting within 50 yards of my house. Consequently I learned a lot, it was very rewarding, and a lot of fun. It also opened my eyes to aspects of behavior by local birds that I didn't know previously.

A critical component of contributing to the Atlas is entering breeding codes on the eBird lists for the species that you encounter. Under the entry for each species, there's a button for "breeding code." The codes indicate the level of evidence for breeding and there are three broad categories: possible, probable, and confirmed.

The weakest level in the "possible" category is "adult in suitable habitat," which means that you found an adult in an area where there could be nesting but didn't see direct breeding activity. An example might be seeing a House Finch perched in a bush in your yard. The strongest level of breeding evidence in the "confirmed breeding" category is "nest with young," such as finding an Anna's Hummingbird nest with chicks.

The details of the breeding codes are important and can get complicated, so please read the descriptions carefully for each code: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/about/breeding-codes*

Feel free to email me at *lbenner@charter.net* if you still have questions.

Although the emphasis of the Atlas is on breeding, we encourage observations using the Atlas eBird portal all year because there are some species that breed year-round and because we want to obtain a more complete understanding of birds that are present in the state throughout the year, even if they aren't breeding.

How 2026 Compares So Far to the 1990s Atlas Effort

Within Los Angeles County, the Atlas has already revealed dramatic changes in the distributions of several species since the 1990s.

Several exotic species are much more common than they were 30 years ago, most notably Eurasian Collared Doves, Swinhoe's White-Eyes, Red-crowned Amazons, Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Scaly-breasted Munias, and Pin-tailed Whydahs. On the other hand, Spotted Doves, which were common into the late 1990s, have vanished on the mainland.

The increase of Vermilion Flycatchers has been explosive, and they are now common in many city parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and other open areas. Neotropic Cormorants, not even recorded in the county in the 1990s, are now relatively common in suitable habitat, and Yellow-crowned Night Herons are increasing. Nanday Parakeets are also expanding in canyons in the Santa Monica Mountains west toward Ventura.

However, other species are contracting: White-tailed Kites are now rare, Loggerhead Shrikes have become uncommon on the coastal slope, Burrowing Owl numbers have plummeted, and Tricolored Blackbirds have crashed.

In the greater Pasadena area, local birders have been very active for the Atlas and have already documented more species in many of the blocks in 2026 than were found during five years of the previous Atlas. The block with the most species is Pasadena CE, which includes Hahamongna Watershed Park. This block has received more than 500 hours of Atlas effort, 94 species have been reported with a breeding code, and breeding has been confirmed for 64. These numbers are all significantly higher than totals from the first Atlas. The pattern is similar for the blocks that include Huntington Gardens, the Los Angeles Arboretum, Griffith Park, and Bonelli Regional Park.

How to Determine Where Your Effort Is Most Needed

Even with all the effort locally, this is a massive project with little or no coverage for hundreds of Atlas blocks in Los Angeles County and thousands more across the state. We need your help!

One of the best places to bird is in your own yard and neighborhood. Many residential blocks in the Los Angeles area lack coverage, particularly in the San Fernando Valley, away from the foothills, and in the urban core.

How can you tell where your effort would be the most useful? The eBird website includes a nifty tool to check coverage, the Atlas Effort Map: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/effortmap*

This shows a map of the entire state with colors to indicate the level of effort in each of the blocks. If you zoom in, you can click on any block to see a summary of results, including the number of species with a breeding code and the number confirmed. Many blocks in the Los Angeles area should have 50+ species and most of the blocks in the foothills should have more than 60.

The Atlas website also includes a more technical tool known as "Blockboard" to track progress: *https://blockboard.californiabirdatlas.org*

Blockboard shows the species reported as possible, probable, and confirmed, but crucially, it also uses previous eBird data to estimate species that could be present in the block that haven't been reported yet. This is invaluable for targeting species not yet documented.

More generally, to get various overviews of the Atlas results, which are updated daily, go to: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/explore*

How to Join the California Bird Atlas If You Haven't Already

The principal way to contribute data to the Bird Atlas is through eBird lists submitted to the dedicated eBird portal. Joining is easy. On a computer, go to: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/home*

Then click on the rectangle that says "Join Project" on the lower left. This will allow you to enter the dedicated Bird Atlas eBird portal.

From a smartphone using the eBird mobile app, select "Choose Projects" on the home screen and then select the California Bird Atlas. If you don't see "Choose Projects," then you may need to update to the latest version of the app.

Please note that the Atlas eBird portal is different from the regular eBird portal. Data entered into eBird through the Atlas portal will appear in the regular part of eBird but not vice versa. The Atlas portal has a number of features specific to the Atlas that allow anyone to check progress anywhere in the state, to summarize the species found in each block, to find the blocks that still need coverage, and so forth.

Before starting, please look over the instructions to learn how the Atlas works and to make sure that your data are as valuable as possible. The quick start guide is a good place to start: *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/about/start*

Please also check the frequently asked questions (FAQs): *https://ebird.org/atlascalifornia/about/faqs*

The California Bird Atlas is a lot of fun, very rewarding, and we need help, so we hope you'll join us!

Join Pasadena Audubon's Conservation Efforts

by Dave Weeshoff, PAS Conservation Chair

As you may have read in an email from us, we have gone public with our plea to vote NO on Proposition 45 on the November 3 ballot, along with other conservation organizations such as the Arroyos and Foothills Conservancy, Center for Biological Diversity, Los Angeles Audubon, Sea and Sage Audubon, and San Diego Bird Alliance. Proposition 45 is a serious threat to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) passed in 1970, which is the critical legal process to protect the state's environment.

If you haven't voted yet by the time you receive this and you'd like to preserve environmental conservation across the state, I urge you to vote NO on Proposition 45. For over 50 years the CEQA has provided citizens the opportunity to evaluate and influence construction projects by way of formal public comment periods and legal options. Hundreds of nonprofit organizations, including Pasadena Audubon Society, have actively participated in CEQA evaluations. As a result, many projects were modified to prevent adverse environmental consequences. Proposition 45 guts CEQA, flipping the law to stifle public processes and restrict legal actions in order to protect corporate profits over public health, clean air, and pure water.

I sincerely hope Proposition 45 will fail. If not, we will continue to fight the good fight, with every breath, to protect and improve our avian habitat despite reduced opportunities to be heard. Here are other ways we are actively doing that, and where you might be able to join us.

Avian Conservation and Advocacy is a Team Sport

As we pursue urban conservation opportunities throughout Southern California, we acknowledge that many require deep knowledge, experience, and personal relationships we might not have within Pasadena Audubon Society. Therefore, we actively pursue complementary relationships with other conservation-related organizations within the San Gabriel Valley and beyond.

If you are also a member of another conservation organization, for example those regarding native plants, trees, soils, fire prevention, environmental law, sources and uses of water, climate change, or city, county, or state ongoing legislation, please consider joining us in our mission to protect and expand bird habitats. We value your knowledge.

Ongoing Conservation and Advocacy Opportunities

We continue to pursue various local opportunities to influence a variety of initiatives, including local stormwater capture and reuse projects, climate change, outdoor cats, window collisions, public native trees, Eaton Canyon Nature Center, trash cleanup, other wildlife issues, as well as the national 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Endangered Species Act, Environmental Protection Act, and California Marine Protected Areas.

Our current activities include community outreach (tabling, lectures), attending meetings and speaking, responding to letter-writing campaigns, and letters to the editor.

As usual, if you have any questions or comments regarding Conservation or Advocacy topics or wish to directly support our efforts, please contact me, any time, any day at 818-618-1652 or email *weeshoff@sbcglobal.net*.

What Could El Niño Mean for Southern California Birds This Winter?

Southern California birders may have an especially interesting winter ahead. NOAA's latest ENSO outlook gives El Niño more than a 90% chance of reaching very strong strength during fall and winter 2026–27, with a 75% chance that the October–December event will exceed the strength of previous El Niños in NOAA's record dating to 1950.

NOAA's current outlook also favors above-normal precipitation across Southern California, although seasonal forecasts describe probabilities, not a guarantee of a wet winter.

What could all of this mean for birds?

Rain can stimulate plant growth and increase seeds, fruits, and insects, potentially benefiting birds that depend on those resources. USGS research has found relationships between precipitation and bird abundance in Southern California, although species respond differently to changing conditions.

Winter rainfall can also refill seasonal ponds and wetlands, creating habitat for ducks, grebes, shorebirds, and other water-dependent birds. But more rain isn't automatically better: intense storms can temporarily flood or disrupt habitat, and the timing of precipitation can matter as much as the total amount.

Along the coast, El Niño could bring serious challenges for seabirds. El Niño typically weakens California's cold, nutrient-rich coastal upwelling, reducing the productivity of the marine food web and potentially leaving fish and seabirds with less food. The California Coastal Commission notes that these effects can cascade from fish to seabirds and other marine wildlife.

That concern is particularly relevant this year. A marine heat wave has already contributed to starvation among California Brown Pelicans, cormorants, loons, grebes, and Common Murres, as unusually warm ocean temperatures have disrupted the availability of krill, anchovies, and sardines. Scientists are concerned that the developing El Niño could worsen the ongoing die-off.



Brown Pelican © Bridget Duffin ML666133881

A similar pattern occurred during the 2015–16 El Niño, when poor ocean conditions contributed to reduced seabird breeding and food availability along the California coast. While another large-scale die-off is not inevitable, the combination of an existing marine heat wave and a strengthening El Niño makes this an especially important winter for watching Southern California's seabirds.

Whatever the season brings, El Niño offers birders a chance to see firsthand how closely birds are connected to changing weather, habitat, and food supplies.

COMMON POORWILL: A Delightfully Creepy Caprimulgid

by Carl Matthies, PAS Programs Coordinator

The Halloween spirit tarries, arriving well before and lingering well past October 31. México's Día de los Muertos, the spectacular celebration of loved ones who have passed on, takes place November 1 and 2. Thus it still feels seasonally appropriate to write about one of our spookiest local birds in this issue of the Wrentit.

The Common Poorwill belongs to a family of birds so heavily steeped in sinister folklore that even their common name, "goatsuckers," and Latin name (capra = goat, mulgere = to extract milk) derive from an ancient belief that these birds caused blindness in nanny goats by furtively draining their udders in the night. Native Americans and European settlers shared a superstition that a goatsucker singing outside the home augured grave misfortune for the inhabitants.

The Eastern Whip-poor-will, cousin to the Common Poorwill, helps establish the scary atmosphere in Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and serves as the species clairvoyantly attuned to the imminent arrival of a barn-sized monster from outer space in H.P. Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror." Then there's the soul-devouring demon in the literal hellscape of Dutch Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," depicted with a human body and a head that bears an awfully strong resemblance to a goatsucker.

The Common Poorwill and its relatives are in fact harmless to humans and goats, so how did they acquire such a frightening reputation? The answer may lie in the goatsuckers' appearance and natural history, both of which, it's hard to deny, are a bit creepy.

Common Poorwills are among the most cryptic birds you'll ever see, or not see, such that if you inadvertently encounter one, you're liable to startle each other. Their plumage looks remarkably similar to the leaf litter they like to lurk in, or perhaps a bit of rock or tree root protruding from the ground. They have broad, flat heads, miniscule bills that belie a most impressive maw, and rictal bristles so wild and luxuriant you'd think they're using Latisse in their "beauty regimen." Their dark-brown eyes appear a void of jet black in most light, but like other nocturnal predators, they have a layer of reflective cells behind their retinas called the tapetum lucidum. Their eyes glow a demonic red-orange when a beam of light is reflected back through blood-rich tissue. Indeed, anyone searching for Common Poorwills is advised that their eyeshine betrays them on crepuscular, lamp-aided bike rides or hikes through suitable habitat.

Common Poorwill behaviors only burnish their paranormal bona fides. To catch favorite prey items—moths and beetles—they fly erratically, almost bat-like, making sorties from on or near the ground. Like vampires, they can exist in a deep torpor of suspended animation, with their metabolism slowed by over 90%, for weeks or even months when temperatures cool and insects become scarce. This extraordinary ability was noticed long ago by the Hopi people, to whom the Common Poorwill is known as Hõlchoko, "The Sleeping One."



A Common Poorwill's eye, reflecting the camera's flash, glows like a witch's cauldron.



"Stay back!" A Common Poorwill makes itself menacing to deter a perceived threat.

© Laure Wilson Neish ML219566491

Like werewolves, Common Poorwills are lunatics, in the sense that they become more active around the full moon. Maximally moonlit nights are associated with increased vocalization and feeding. This predilection makes perfect sense when you consider that Common Poorwills, like most birds, are predominantly visual foragers, and also because the moths they like to eat are "positively phototactic," meaning they are drawn toward the light of the moon and are likewise more active at this stage of the lunar cycle.

When their camouflage doesn't work, Common Poorwills have a backup plan. Like shapeshifters, they transform from meek, defenseless birds into something much more menacing. Rocking back and forth with wings extended, they lunge forward, mouths agape and hissing. They appear vaguely draconiform, to the point that one half expects them to disgorge a blast of flame to cap off the performance. It's an idle threat, but surely enough to make most interlopers think twice about further provocation.

The song of the Common Poorwill is otherworldly to anyone who doesn't know its provenance, as are the songs of other sedentary Caprimulgids around the globe. This is why as a group they're also commonly known as "nightjars," according to the meaning of a "jar" as a harsh, discordant sound. To the greenhorn camper, the Common Poorwill is a classic "thing that goes bump in the night."

Last, but not least, even basic aspects of the Common Poorwill's natural history are unknown, contributing to their mystique. Little data have been gathered, for example, on rates of reproductive success and typical lifespan. What a tantalizing opportunity for young ornithologists, the chance to enrich our understanding of these remarkable creatures!

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Golden Eagle at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

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