



Phainopepla

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February / March 2014

Monthly Programs

SFVAS General Membership Meetings
Encino Community Center

Thursday, February 27, 2014

7:00 p.m. Social time; 7:30 p.m. Meeting

Presenter: Dave Weeshoff

Topic: Iceland, Greenland and Arctic Canada
– Wildlife and native cultures in the Arctic



Our president, Dave Weeshoff will present highlights of his 24-day-trip to the high arctic, including birds, marine mammals, plants, and the Inuit and Viking cultures of that area.

Included are some amazing photos of arctic glacier ice, pack ice, various whales, walruses, seals, and polar bear behaving as you've not seen before.



Thursday, March 27, 2014

7:00 p.m. Social time; 7:30 p.m. Meeting

Presenters: Conservation Committee Members

Topic: Conservation Issues in and Around the San Fernando Valley

Our chapter is actively engaged in educating children and adults about the values, complexities, and enjoyment that can be found in natural environments. Our hope is that this education will, not only make better citizens, but will lead to actions that improve the quality and/or quantity of those habitats. A case in point is the 2012 "habitat conversion" that took place in the south reserve of the Sepulveda Basin. After more than 100 trees and 48 acres of plants and animals were bulldozed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, our chapter's volunteers got involved. Working with local politicians, public agencies, and other community groups and individuals we were able to bring about significant changes in the way things are being done.

Come to this open meeting for an update on this topic, as well as to learn about how we accomplished what we did, as well as other issues of interest in our region including: plans for the Chatsworth Nature Preserve, the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, Los Angeles River Revitalization Project, and a large proposed development in Brown's Canyon. We hope you'll join us to find out more about these issues and join us in making a difference.

SFVAS General Membership Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month (except July, August, and November). ALL ARE WELCOME to join us at 7:00 p.m. for refreshments and view our sales table; program begins at 7:30 p.m. We meet at the Encino Community Center, 4935 Balboa Blvd. Encino. See Calendar of Events, pages 5–6, for directions.



2013 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Another year—another outstanding CBC. This one held under shirt sleeve conditions, with warm, windless weather. Aided by 59 counters, including 17 count leaders, we covered 32 locations ranging from small parks to large natural areas like Sepulveda Basin, Balboa Park and Hansen Dam. Results were a little better than last year, with a different line-up of unusual birds.

The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to assess the health of the bird population, by comparing the total number of birds seen in a count circle with earlier counts. However, birders being birders, diversity is also an important factor, comparing the total number of species seen with past years. This year we counted 142 species and added three more seen during count week, giving us an impressive 145, our highest count total since 1995 and third highest ever. By contrast, we counted 14,591 individual birds which is down ten percent from our average.



Uncommon birds included Common Ground-Dove at Hansen Dam, the first ever seen in the 57 year history of the San Fernando Valley CBC (*Above photo by Phil Richardson*). A White-faced Ibis was seen at Sepulveda Basin, marking only the second time one has been seen on the count. A Pine Warbler, wintering for its fourth successive year was well heard at Hansen Dam. This marks the second count observation. Also, Hansen Dam yielded a single Swamp Sparrow, the first since 2002 and only the fourth in count history.

Also unusual, and invading much of southern California this winter were two Golden-crowned Kinglets, marking only the third time they have been seen in the history of the count circle. These birds, always difficult to see, were found at Veteran's Park, which always yields unusual birds not seen elsewhere in the circle. Beside the kinglets, a male Williamson's Sapsucker and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were seen only there.

And, for the third time, a Northern Pygmy Owl was recorded at Bee Canyon. Ash-throated Flycatcher, common in the early years of the count was seen for the first time since 1999.

Sepulveda Basin won the award for the most number of Unique Species. Kris Ohlenkamp, who has counted this sector continuously since 1982, recorded 80 species, his highest total ever, with 14 unique species, including Ross's Goose, Mute Swan, Common Loon, Western Grebe, Green Heron, White-faced Ibis, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-chevroned Parakeet, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Violet-green Swallow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Purple Finch.

Once again this year we were granted access by the Department of Water & Power to count the Chatsworth Nature Preserve. This area gave us Greater Roadrunner not seen anywhere else in the circle.

This year's species winner for highest count, at 1987, was Canada Goose. Runner-ups include 1302 American Coots, mostly at Lake Balboa, and our winter friends at every park, 1100 Yellow-rumped Warbler, although this year, all Audubons; not a single Myrtles.

The presence of water always increases bird diversity, so as expected Hansen Dam, the Sepulveda Basin, and Pacoima Spreading grounds produced the highest bird count. Sepulveda Basin, including Lake Balboa and the Los Angeles River produced 80 species (*Continued next page*)

(*CBC-continued*) and Hansen Dam 78 species. Doug Martin, counting on his own in the northeastern sector, counted 98 species in four sites.

Ron Melin and Jim Estes did their annual pre-dawn owl watch in Bee Canyon and Tracy Drake counted O'Melveny Park. Together, they came up with unique sightings, including Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Western-screech Owl, and one Great-horned Owl.

As is shown each year, it is important to cover as much of the circle as possible. Thirty-seven species, an amazing 25 percent of all species recorded were observed at only one location.


This year we had the highest ever counts of Eurasian Collared-dove, an expanding species. There were several common species with the highest count since 2000, including White-throated Swift, Lewis's Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Nanday Parakeet, and Spotted Towhee.

And, there were common species with the lowest count since 2000. These included Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Green Heron, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, European Starling (which some will take as good

news), Great-tailed Grackles (which others will take as good news) and House Sparrows (which even others will take as good news).

Of interest, there are nine species that have been recorded on all 57 counts, including Pied-billed Grebe, Cooper's Hawk, Killdeer, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Western Meadowlark.

Notable misses of birds usually seen on the count include Cinnamon Teal—not seen the last two years—Clark's Grebe, Barn Owl, and Long-eared Owl—which was resident in a location no longer accessible to counters. The most notable miss was Tree Swallow, which has been missed only one other time since 2000. Additional misses include Marsh Wren, Wilson's Warbler, and Tricolored Blackbird which seems to be nearly extirpated from the valley, 1000 of which were counted in 1970.

Thanks to the group leaders and counters who gave several hours of their holiday season to participate in this fun event. 

Thanks to all 2013 count participants

Dick Barth
Pat Bates
Jean Brandt
Teri Carnesciali
Liz Chaneski
Jody Church
Alex Coffey
Roxanne Correa
Katy Delaney
Austin Diamond
Mimi DiMatteo
Mary Ellen Dittmore
Tracy Drake
Debbie Drews
Bill Eaton
Jim Estes
Pam Folgert
Barbara Gaitley
Kimball Garrett
Kendra Fleagle Gorlitsky

Barbara Heidemann
Kathleen Hood
Judy Howell
Barbara Johnson
Diana Keeney
Jed Kim
Allan Kotin
Muriel Kotin
Brenda Kuo
Art Langton
Rose Leibowitz
Brett LeVine
Rebecca LeVine
John Lobel
Scott Logan
Jeffery Mann
Doug Martin
Judy Matsuoka
Ron Melin
Mark Miller

Ryan Miller
Jacque Milofsky
Jim Moore
Kerry Morris
Ann Ohlenkamp
Kris Ohlenkamp
Carolyn Oppenheimer
Mark Osokow
Kathlyn Powell
Phil Richardson
Judith Rothman
Ann Shabtay
Sharon Shingai
Loren Smith
Dave Surtees
Donna Timlin
Tom Tan
Don White
William Yong

2013 Christmas Bird Count Summary

	Greater White-fronted			
10	Goose	1	Herring Gull	6
2	Snow Goose	18	Gull Sp.	2
2	Ross' Goose	500	Rock Pigeon	74
3	Cackling Goose	30	Band-tailed Pigeon	41
1987	Canada Goose	25	Eurasian Collared-Dove	89
2	Mute Swan	436	Mourning Dove	37
3	Wood Duck	1	Common Ground-Dove	106
61	Gadwall	2	Greater Roadrunner	37
694	American Wigeon	3	Western Screech-Owl	40
412	Mallard	13	Great Horned Owl	379
70	Northern Shoveler	1	Northern- Pygmy-Owl	67
46	Green-winged Teal	296	White Throated Swift	122
2	Canvasback	178	Anna's Hummingbird	8
84	Ring-necked Duck	1	Costa's Hummingbird (CW)	4
8	Lesser Scaup	62	Allen's Hummingbird	12
49	Bufflehead	17	Hummingbird species	1
25	Hooded Merganser	3	Belted Kingfisher	1
88	Ruddy Duck	8	Lewis's Woodpecker	1101
104	California Quail	110	Acorn Woodpecker	1
1	Common Loon	1	Williamson's Sapsucker	1
43	Pied-billed Grebe	1	Yellow-breasted Sapsucker	85
3	Eared Grebe	7	Red-breasted Sapsucker	8
1	Western Grebe	44	Nuttall's Woodpecker	191
116	Double-crested Cormorant	5	Downey Woodpecker	18
51	American White Pelican	77	Northern Flicker (red-shafted)	112
16	Great Blue Heron	10	American Kestrel	164
19	Great Egret	3	Merlin	6
7	Snowy Egret	3	Peregrine Falcon	67
1	Green Heron	10	Nanday Parakeet	8
26	Black-crowned Night-Heron	35	Yellow-chevron Parakeet	1
2	White-faced Ibis	124	Black Phoebe	672
28	Turkey Vulture	24	Say's Phoebe	53
2	Osprey	1	Ash-throated Flycatcher	291
				Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)
				Dark-eyed Junco (slate colored)
1	White-tailed Kite	33	Cassin's Kingbird	2
2	Northern Harrier	1	Loggerhead Shrike	1
1	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Solitary Vireo	66
9	Cooper's Hawk	2	Hutton's Vireo	264
10	Red-shouldered Hawk	2	Steller's Jay	170
72	Red-tailed Hawk	216	Western Scrub-Jay	26
1	Sora	311	American Crow	215
1302	American Coot	165	Common Raven	526
2	Black-necked Stilt	3	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	1
61	Killdeer	2	Violet-green Swallow	295
1	Spotted Sandpiper	3	Barn Swallow	6
2	Greater Yellowlegs	2	Mountain Chickadee	209
40	Least Sandpiper	48	Oak Titmouse	66
6	Western Sandpiper	424	Bushtit	
1	Wilson's Snipe	25	White-breasted Nuthatch	
20	Peep species	8	Rock Wren	
71	Ring-billed Gull	2	Canyon Wren	
8	Western Gull	6	House Wren	
25	California Gull	34	Bewick's Wren	

145 Total Species
14591 Individual Birds

Calendar of Events

February

Saturday, February 1. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Directions: Take closest freeway to I-5 North and exit at Parker Road. Turn right and proceed to stop sign (Castaic Road), proceed to next stop sign (Lake Hughes Road), proceed to next stop sign (Castaic Lake Drive) and turn right. Entrance to the park is on the right. Parking is in Lot 4, so make a right turn after the kiosk, then an immediate left turn into the lot, parking to the left. Leader: Roger McClure. For information, contact the staff at (661) 257-4050.

Sunday, February 2. Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.

Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Leader: Kris Ohlenkamp. Contact him at kris.ohlenkamp@sfvaudubon.org or (747) 444-9683.

Saturday, February 8. Beginners and Family Bird Walk.

9:00–11:00 a.m. Come on out for a fun bird walk at Sepulveda Basin! These popular walks, designed for beginning birders and school-age children, have resumed for the current cool season. Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Meet across the road from the parking lot at the low buildings. Leader(s): Muriel Kotin, (310) 457-5796 or Diana Keeney, (818) 998-3216. Reservations are not needed except for large groups. **Rain cancels.** Please visit our website www.sfvaudubon.org.

Saturday, February 8. Placerita Canyon Nature Center

Docents' Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 405 or 5 Freeway north to the 14 Freeway. Exit the 14 at Placerita Canyon. Turn right at the end of the off ramp and continue about 1.5 miles to the park entrance. Turn right and park at the Nature Center. Various leaders. For more information, call the Nature Center at (661) 259-7721.

The 17th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 14–

17. Join in counting the birds you see in your neighborhood, for as little as 15 minutes, and submit your sightings to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html>. For more information see page nine.

Saturday, February 15. Monthly Field Trip: Ventura County

Game Preserve in Oxnard. Meeting Time 7:45 a.m. An excellent spot at which to observe a wide variety of birds including waterfowl, wetland birds and raptors. We will be

birding the preserve entirely on foot. Covering the circuit will probably require 4+ hours. We will leave our cars on the left (north) side of the paved road outside the preserve compound. Directions: From the 101 Freeway take the Las Posas Road exit south (left), then Hueneme Road west (right) to Casper Road. Turn south (left) on Casper Road and continue to where the road eventually turns left through a large entrance gate and leads to the compound. We'll meet at the entrance gate at 7:45 a.m. and wait for the preserve manager to open up for us at approximately 8:00; we'll then drive to the compound. Bring lunch and drinking water. Allow one hour and fifteen minutes driving time from the Valley. Leader is Richard Barth (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, February 15. Santa Monica Mts. Conservancy Bird Walk at Towsley Canyon. 8:00–10:00 a.m.

Directions: Go north on I-5 through Santa Clarita, exit Calgrove and turn west (left) under the freeway and then left again on the Old Road. Watch for the sign, "Ed Davis Park at Towsley Canyon." Turn right and park in the back lot. Meet at the kiosk. Leader: Roger McClure. For further information, call (661) 252-6187.

Sunday, February 16. Malibu Creek State Park Bird Walk.

8:00 a.m. Meet at the second (lower) day-use parking lot. Entrance to the park is on the west side of Las Virgenes Road, just south of Mulholland Hwy. Entrance fee is \$12 per car. Leader(s): Muriel Kotin, (310) 457-5796 and/or Art Langton.

Tuesday, February 18. Weekday Walk at O'Melveny Park,

Granada Hills. 9:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. **RAIN CANCELS.** Contact Carolyn Oppenheimer at (818) 885-7493 (before 7 p.m.), or carolyn.oppenheimer@sfvaudubon.org.

Thursday, February 27. SFVAS General Membership Meeting. 7:00 p.m.

Encino Community Center, 4935 Balboa Blvd., Encino. Located between Moorpark and Ventura Blvd., on the west side of Balboa, just south of the Presbyterian Church. **Presenter: Dave Weeshoff TOPIC: Iceland, Greenland and Arctic Canada—Wildlife and native cultures in the Arctic.** For more information see Monthly Programs, page one.

March

Saturday, March 1. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Directions: Take closest freeway to I-5 North and exit at Parker Road. Turn right and proceed to stop sign (Castaic Road), proceed to next stop sign (Lake Hughes Road), proceed to next stop sign (Castaic Lake Drive) and turn right. Entrance to the park is on the right. Parking is in Lot 4, so make a right turn after the kiosk, then an immediate left turn

into the lot, parking to the left. Leader: Roger McClure. For information, contact the staff at (661) 257-4050.

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Tuesday, March 4. Antelope Valley Quarterly Bird Meeting. 6:30 p.m. The Prime Desert Woodland Preserve in the Elyze Clifford Interpretive Center, at 43201 35th Street, Lancaster.

Saturday, March 8. FINAL Beginners and Family Bird Walk of the Season! 9:00–11:00 a.m. These popular walks are designed for beginning birders and school-age children. Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Meet across the road from the parking lot at the low buildings. Leader(s): Muriel Kotin, (310) 457-5796 or Diana Keeney, (818) 998-3216. Reservations are not needed except for large groups. **Rain cancels.** Please visit our website www.sfvaudubon.org.

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Saturday & Sunday, March 15–16. Monthly Field Trip: Morro Bay Weekend! The first day, Saturday, March 15, we'll meet at 8:00 a.m. on the near (inland) side of Morro Rock. Park along the main road just before it swings around the side of the Rock. The second day, **Sunday, March 16**, we'll meet at the Montana de Oro State Park Headquarters/Visitor Center at 8:00 a.m. Our species tally is usually very high on this trip. Pigeon Guillemot and Chestnut-backed Chickadee are expected. Directions from the San Fernando Valley: Take the 101 Freeway to San Luis Obispo and then follow Route 1 north

to the town of Morro Bay. Allow at least four hours driving time from the Valley. Bring lunch and drinks. Be prepared for possible inclement weather, and remember that the central coast can be quite chilly in the mornings. Make camping or motel reservations as soon as possible. Leader is Richard Barth (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, March 15. Santa Monica Mts. Conservancy Bird Walk at Towsley Canyon. 8:00–10:00 a.m. Directions: Go north on I-5 through Santa Clarita, exit Calgrove and turn west (left) under the freeway and then left again on the Old Road. Watch for the sign, "Ed Davis Park at Towsley Canyon." Turn right and park in the back lot. Meet at the kiosk. Leader: Roger McClure. For further information, call (661) 252-6187.

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Tuesday, March 18. O'Melveny Weekday Walk at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 9:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. **RAIN CANCELS.** Contact Carolyn Oppenheimer at (818) 885-7493 (before 7 p.m.), or carolyn.oppenheimer@sfvaudubon.org.

Monday, March 24. SFVAS Board Meeting. 7:00 p.m. Balboa Mission Town Hall, 16916 San Fernando Mission Blvd., at Balboa (southeast corner) in Granada Hills.

Thursday, March 27. SFVAS General Membership Meeting. 7:00 p.m. Social time.; 7:30 p.m. Meeting. Encino Community Center, 4935 Balboa Blvd., Encino. Located between Moorpark and Ventura Blvd., on the west side of Balboa, just south of the Presbyterian Church. **TOPIC: Conservation issues in and around the San Fernando Valley. PRESENTERS: Conservation Committee Members.** For more information see Monthly Programs, page one.

Save the Date: SFVAS Annual Haskell Creek Clean-up tentatively scheduled Saturday, April 12. See next issue for details.

Future Field Trips (details later):

April 26. Morongo Valley

May 10. Walker Ranch



Bird Banding Workshops at Starr Ranch

Beginning & Advanced Banding Workshops March 8—9 and March 15—16

Reservations and Questions: Megan Garfinkel, mbgarfinkel@gmail.com; (949) 858-0309.



Audubon-at-Home by Alan Pollack

“Have some poison, my dear...”

Just suppose you gave a party for some dear friends and without being aware of it, many of the dishes you served up were poisoned! Not a pleasant thought, but that is exactly the scenario that takes place when you reach for the rodenticide, insecticide or herbicide to get rid of those pesky moles, insects, or weeds in your garden. Your garden is an invitation to our wildlife friends and they eat what is served, including the just poisoned rodent, insect or weed. And let's not forget that as these poisons are being applied and leach into the soil and water table, humans are also being exposed and slowly poisoned. So, what are the alternatives? There are many! Let's consider one problem at a time.

PESTS, such as rats, moles, mice, etc. Eliminate food sources (such as fallen fruit, or dog and cat food placed outdoors) and shelter (such as large patches of Algerian ivy). Build or buy nesting boxes to attract barn owls (one family of barn owls will eat 1000 or more rodents/year). If you must, traps that kill quickly and humanely.


INSECTS: To begin with, learn to distinguish harmful from beneficial insects, such as praying mantids, assassin bugs, green lacewings, lady beetles, and hover flies. Biologic control is an effort to keep insects controlled (not eliminated) and begins with purchasing plants that are resistant to insect attack and/or are attractive to beneficial insects. Most often these are plants that are native to your area. Keep plants healthy by first, choosing plants likely to grow well in your garden spot (and again, natives are a good choice) and by giving them the proper water, food (if needed) and maintenance. Watch for early signs of disease or infestation. If either is observed, mechanical controls include removing the diseased portion of the plant or, the whole plant, if necessary; a strong spray from your water hose can remove clinging insects; a gentle spray of water in the morning will get rid of powdery mildew (whereas at night, it will encourage mildew). If chemical controls are

necessary (hopefully, the last resort), using the least toxic is best for our environment. Many common household products can be effective and are less harmful than the chemicals sold in garden stores. For example, a mixture of baking soda and liquid soap will treat both blackspot fungus and powdery mildew. An insecticidal soap solution can be purchased at garden stores. In time, when the good bugs establish themselves, these measures will be unnecessary.


HERBICIDES Most of the herbicide use in the U.S. is applied to lawns. Since a lawn has very little value for wildlife and also consumes an enormous amount of water, fertilizer, and care (read \$\$\$\$\$) in addition to herbicide, reducing the size of (or totally eliminating!) your lawn would make a big dent in herbicide use. And since Mother Nature abhors bare soil the way she abhors a vacuum, keeping a layer of mulch on all bare soil areas will inhibit weed growth (as well as conserve soil moisture and improve soil structure). When weeds appear, pulling them out works well (best done before they go to seed) and is good exercise! Weeds in cracked concrete or asphalt can be killed with a propane torch or a strong vinegar solution.

Learn more about non-toxic, environmentally-friendly, sustainable gardening practices at www.finegardening.com (click on pests and diseases) and at www.wasteless.org (click on environmentally preferable purchasing and then on less toxic gardening/IPM).

There, now, aren't you less worried about throwing your next "garden party?" Alan Pollack

Please e-mail Alan Pollack, our Audubon-at-Home Chair, with any questions you have with regard to creating a wildlife-friendly garden that can be used for publication. Alan offers **FREE** consultation/landscape design to help you make your yard wildlife friendly. He also gives a **FREE**, PowerPoint slide show/lecture to community groups, high school, and college classes on attracting wildlife to your garden and sustainable gardening practices. He can be contacted at (818) 340-2347 or at alan.pollack@sfvaudubon.org. 

Monthly Field Trip Report by Richard Barth

On November 16 we visited Ventura Harbor and the nearby Ventura Water Treatment Ponds. At the harbor was at least one hybrid Black X American Oystercatcher—apparently two have been present there for some time. The treatment ponds featured only ten species of ducks with Redhead, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, and Bufflehead receiving the most attention. Common Gallinule was a nice find at the ponds, as was a fly-over American White Pelican. Our raptors for the day: Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, American Kestrel and Turkey Vulture. Among the passerines seen were American Pipit, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Western Meadowlark, Tree Swallow (late date), Song Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. Other birds of some note making our list: Bonaparte's Gull, Sanderling, Black-bellied Plover, Black Oystercatcher, Pelagic Cormorant, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Whimbrel, Caspian Tern, Forster's Tern and the five expected species of herons. After the walk Dave Weeshoff and I birded off Marina Park and added Common Loon, Black Turnstone and Ruddy Turnstone. Later as I was leaving I picked up Mew Gull. 



Birdathon 2014 *by Lynn Maddox and Diana Keeney*

Plans are underway for our annual Birdathon, which will take place during April and May of 2014. The Birdathon is our main fundraising event of the year and involves many activities, all aimed at spotting as many species of birds as possible and collecting donations from generous sponsors.


The funds generated by the Birdathon enable SFVAS to host 2,000 school children in the Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program (SBEEP). Funds also allow us to contribute to habitat conservation efforts and to continue our mission to increase public awareness and broaden appreciation of wildlife and the natural environment.

Birdathon activities include many of the regularly-scheduled monthly bird walks as well as several once-a-year marathon events, fondly known as "Big Days." The Birdathon leaders compete with each other and with themselves, trying to improve on the previous year's tallies! But everyone is a winner when the donations are received and SFVAS has funding to continue our important functions! Two Birdathon events begun recently will continue in 2014: the Children's Birdathon and the Big Sit. The Children's Birdathon is for junior birders who will tally bird species with their families on a special day and the Big Sit is for anyone who likes to sit still and let the birds come to them. Watch for details in the April/May *Phainopepla*, and please plan to participate in one or more events! In lieu of a separate mailing, all information, sponsor forms, and donation envelopes will be included in the newsletter and at our website www.sfvaudubon.org. 

Phainopepla Photo of the Month *by Hilda Tomberlin*




The photo for this issue comes from Hilda Tomberlin, a faithful reader of the *Phainopepla* and supporter of our cause in the Sepulveda Basin. She took this photo this past March with her iPhone. She was driving near the basin when she spotted the egret in a non-natural setting. Hilda says, "It reminds me how important the Society's work to preserve the basin from the capricious cutting by the Army Corps of Engineers" is. "Thanks for your work on behalf of our beautiful birds." Thank you, Hilda.

Please submit your photos to Lynn.Maddox@sfvaudubon.org. One picture per photographer per month, preferably of a native bird in our local area. Please include location, date, camera and lens info, a short account of how the photo was taken, and a profile of the photographer. Let us see your bird photos! Thanks, Lynn 



eBird Your Way to the Phainopepla Club

Don't forget to record your Los Angeles County bird sightings from July 2013 to June 2014 on eBird (www.eBird.org) and progress to the **Phainopepla Club!**

The first 50 species you record on eBird puts you at Swallow level. Reaching 100 species is Finch level, 150 is Vireo level, 200 is Avocet, and 250 is Phainopepla Club! The upcoming spring migration and the Birdathon events in April and May are sure to put you over the top—or at least into the next higher category! Phainopepla Club awards will be given at the general membership meeting in June. 

What is the GBBC?

The 2014 GBBC will take place Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17. Please join us for the 17th annual count!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are.

GBBC checklists can be accepted from anywhere in the world!


Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website.


New participants must set up a free GBBC account to submit their checklists or use login information from an existing account for any other Cornell Lab citizen-science project. You'll only need to do this once to participate in all future GBBC events. Click "Submit Your Bird Checklist" at the top of this page or see [How to Participate](#) for more details.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported.

Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest. A selection of images is posted in the online photo gallery.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited. 



We now have **608** people who receive notification by e-mail when the *Phainopepla* is online, **149** of them have opted to only receive it online and save us the paper and postage. **297** people are following us on Facebook. If you wish to be notified when the *Phainopepla* is online, please e-mail us at svaudubonsociety@gmail.com. *NOTE: Membership cards are being sent out to local members and National members who opt not to get a paper copy of the newsletter.* 

What's That Bird? A New App Names the Birds You See

"Merlin" iPhone app asks five questions, reveals nearby birds



Ithaca, NY—The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has released a FREE iPhone app to help people identify 285 birds in North America. Created with support from the National Science Foundation, the app asks just five questions, then displays photos of birds that match your description—customized to your location and time of year.

"We named the app 'Merlin' because of its uncanny, almost magical, way of guessing which bird you saw," says the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Jessie Barry, whose team created

the app with partner Birds in the Hand. "The app is designed for beginning and intermediate bird watchers and we hope birders will share the free app with friends and family."

Barry says that, far from magic, Merlin uses data from citizen-science participants and bird watchers to understand how people see and describe birds—and to narrow the list to the birds found nearby.


The app is the first to use data from the eBird citizen-science project to dynamically select the birds found within about a 30-mile radius of your location at the time when you saw the bird.

Additionally, bird watchers "trained" Merlin to understand how people see and describe birds. By participating in online activities to describe birds based on photos, they contributed more than three million data points that Merlin uses to deduce which birds are the most likely based on people's description of color, size, and behavior.

The app records your response when you confirm the bird you saw, enabling researchers to identify successful interactions and improve Merlin's performance over time. It also displays photos, ID tips, sounds, and range maps for each species.

[The Merlin Bird ID app can now be downloaded from the App Store.](#)

The Cornell Lab plans to release Merlin for Android and online use in the coming months, and to continue adding more species. Merlin is made possible with support from the National Science Foundation, Pennington™ Wild Bird Food, and friends and members of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Cornell Lab is a nonprofit organization with the mission to improve the understanding and protection of birds.

For the Merlin App video and website, please visit birds.cornell.edu/Merlin. **Contact:** Pat Leonard, (607) 254-2137, pe127@cornell.edu 

A Photographic Essay by Heather Medvitz

Sepulveda Basin Walk – Sunday, January 5, 2014 – Leader Kris Ohlenkamp

The following photographs were taken by Richard Medvitz during a recent walk at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Refuge. The first one shows a Red-tailed Hawk that has captured an American Coot. You may be able to just make out the lobed feet of the Coot.

Kris Ohlenkamp led the walk in which a total of 52 bird species were seen. The raptors for the day also included a Cooper's Hawk, Turkey Vultures and an Osprey.



The Osprey is shown landing on a favorite perch.



The bird for the day was a Swamp Sparrow, identified by Kris and shown here.



Our online version of the newsletter, www.sfvaudubon.org, shows the distinctive markings of this rarely seen bird which was a life bird for several on the walk.



A White-faced Ibis

If you haven't yet come for a first Sunday of the month walk, I'd encourage you to join us. (Beginners and first time birders are welcome at the 2nd Saturday Family walks Oct.—March). The Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve is right in our midst and often yields surprising birds along with its regular rich selection of ducks, grebes, wading and shore birds, raptors and passerines.

Olympic BirdFest 2014

Dates: April 4–6, 2014

Location: Sequim, WA

Description: Visit the rain shadow of the **Olympic Peninsula** to discover the birds of the coastal Pacific Northwest—Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Harlequin Ducks, dippers, Black Oystercatchers, Long-tailed Ducks, and more. Guided field trips, a boat cruise in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, silent auction, and a gala banquet. Our featured speaker is Noah Strycker: "Bird World: the fascinating parallels between bird and human behavior". The festival

with the most spectacular setting! Immediately following BirdFest, join us for a three-day, two-night birding cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 6–8, 2014. Contact name: Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, 360.681.4076

Register separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon .

Birdfest website address: www.olympicbirdfest.org

E-mail address: opas.birdfest.info@gmail.com



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For Chapter leaders' e-mail addresses, see our Website:

www.SFVAudubon.org



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Become a member of the
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Mail the form below, and include a check made payable to SFV Audubon Society:

P.O. Box 7769
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Attn: Membership

SFVAS MEMBERSHIP

Regular 1-yr Chapter Membership...\$25 \$ _____

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How did you learn about SFVAS?

The *PHAINOPEPLA*, published six times a year, is the newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409. San Fernando Valley Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, a non-profit conservation/education organization, and is dedicated to "the conservation of wildlife and natural resources."

Articles, letters, drawings, and photographs concerning conservation, the science and ecology, birding, chapter activities, and articles of interest to the membership are welcome for publication in the *PHAINOPEPLA*.

Material from other newsletters or newspapers should include the source and date. Copy for the *PHAINOPEPLA* should be in the hands of the editor by the 3rd of the month to be included in the following month's newsletter.

Membership in the National Audubon Society is \$20 and should be sent separately to:

National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 420235
Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235

For renewals, use the form in the National Audubon magazine, "Audubon."

If you have any questions about membership, renewals, change of address or any other membership concerns, please contact Rose Leibowitz at (818) 990-5405 or e-mail her at rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org.



Phainopepla

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society

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Membership

A big thank you to the National Members who responded to last month's article by becoming local members too!

Whether you belong to National or Local or both, remember you are always welcome on any of our activities and we have plenty to get involved in! Please contact Rose Leibowitz, Membership Chair, with any questions at rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org.

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