



Phainopepla

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Monthly Program

Note: Time Change

Come One...Come All

**Join us for the SFVAS Annual Pot Luck
Thursday, June 27, 2013, 7:00 p.m.
Encino Community Center**

Be prepared to:

- Share a dish
- Play a little bird call Bingo
- Test yourself in naming the parts of a bird
- Guess which species built which nests
- Meet fellow birders and share great food
- Bring or enjoy slides and accompanying bird stories of others

Bring your own plate and utensils. For a dish to share, try to follow the plan for last names as follows:



- A-F Salads
- G-L Side Dishes
- M-P Main Dishes
- N-Z Desserts

(If there is no way you can bring something in your category, we won't turn away whatever else you may prefer to bring) 😊

We will begin at 7:00 p.m. with some fun activities and appetizers and begin the Pot Luck Supper at 7:30 p.m.

allowing a bit more travel time or those coming from work. If you have a bird story with pictures to show and tell, some special California birds, some great shots taken with your new photographic skills, or some exotics from a special trip, bring them on a DVD or thumb drive and give them to Alan Pollack who will run the projector. Please limit your selections to about 15 pictures and presentations to 10—15 minutes.

We will also hold the installation of our new (and continuing) Board of Directors (*see below*). 🐦

Board Nominations *Submitted by the Nominations Committee: Pat Bates, Dottie Ecker and Muriel Kotin, Chair*

The Nominations Committee is pleased to announce the following slate of candidates to serve on the Board of Directors of San Fernando Valley Audubon Society for our 2013—2014 program year which begins on July 1, 2013.

Officers:

- President:** Dave Weeshoff
- 1st VP:** Rose Leibowitz
- 2nd VP:** Heather Medvitz
- Treasurer:** Pat Bates
- Corresponding Secretary:** Diana Keeney
- Recording Secretary:** Lynn Maddox

Board Members at Large:

- 3rd Year: Mark Osokow and Mathew Tekulsky (continuing)
- 2nd Year: Scott Logan (continuing) and Paula Orlovich
- 1st Year: Dave Collins and Ron Gotcher 🐦

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 6-7, for directions.

Destruction of the Sepulveda Basin South Wildlife Area Update *by Kris Ohlenkamp, SFVAS Conservation Chair*

Here is a summary of the situation in the Sepulveda Basin South Wildlife Area as of April 23, 2013.

We have just concluded our 5th meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and they have now rejected all of our proposals for mitigating the damage they did to the 48 acre South Wildlife Reserve in the Sepulveda Basin. They are even refusing to go forward with removing the non-native vegetation—which was the stated purpose of their Vegetative Management Plan in the first place, and which they have been agreeing to do up to this point.

At our March 20 meeting we presented the Corps with a restoration proposal for the area. We extracted it directly from the 1981 Master Plan and several other Corps documents. It included restoration of the Pothole Pond (which they destroyed), construction of another pond with an island and a seasonal (<1 ft. deep) marsh. All of these features had been excavated in 1984, but water was never provided because a source was not procured. This proposal meets all of the Corps objectives for the Vegetative Management Plan (low maintenance, improved security, etc.). It also creates significant improvements in habitat quality and diversity. The Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation (BOS) was at that meeting and said that they can now provide recycled water to those features.

At this week's meeting (April 23), Congressman Sherman's office and BOS were not invited/represented and the Corps only had four lower level employees there to deliver the message that our proposal had been rejected. The reasons given were:

1. It will cost too much money (based upon a larger, more complex, very different proposal for a wetland construction project). Our proposal should cost less than what they had originally planned to spend on the first phase of their Vegetative Management Plan (VMP). Additionally, there is a strong possibility that our proposal could be developed at no cost by moving the stalled wetlands mitigation proposal for Chatsworth Reservoir to the Sepulveda Basin.
2. There is no guaranteed source of permanent water. They said that they are currently negotiating (not true) with BOS for renewal of the lease for the Tillman Reclamation Plant, and that if the lease is rejected and Tillman shut down, the source of water would be lost.



3. If they create wetlands, that would subject them to additional regulatory constraints upon their operations in the Basin. The entire area is

already designated as a wetland, any potential regulatory changes could be negotiated beforehand, and it is difficult to imagine a scenario where their operations could possibly be impacted.

4. Placing any body of water behind the dam may threaten the integrity of the structure itself. This argument is too absurd to comment on.

So, it is obvious that they are not seriously considering anything we have to say. They reject our proposals based upon irrelevant cost comparisons, hypothetical future regulations, imaginary worst case scenarios, and an adamant refusal to spend any money examining the feasibility of our ideas. They say they don't have the money to do any of this, and then their Senior Ecologist (Thomas Keeney) is publicly campaigning against the project by blaming the environmentalists for costing the Corps so much money already. The negotiations have come to a complete standstill.

What you can do is e-mail, call, and/or write Colonel Mark Toy and/or Congressman Brad Sherman's representative (Mathew Dababneh) and comment on any or all of the issues above. Be sure to point out that they are the ones responsible for this fiasco, not the environmentalists.

Colonel Toy: richard.m.toy@usace.army.mil
915 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 1101
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 452-3961


Congressman Sherman: matt.dababneh@mail.house.gov
5000 Van Nuys Blvd. Suite 420
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403
(818) 501-9200

They need to know that we still care, and are still watching. It will make a difference! 🐦

The Children's Birdathon –by Diana Keeney

Ramp closures on the 405 Freeway prevented most families from arriving on time for the May 11 Children's Birdathon, but once they arrived they made up for lost time! Students, siblings, and parents from Marne Treves' class at Mar Vista Elementary School joined volunteers from SFVAS on a search for the varied avian species that can be seen at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve. Well prepared by their teacher, and encouraged by their parents, the students enthusiastically used a taxonomic-order checklist to record their sightings. The students reported 12–30 species of birds on their individual and family lists.



The colorful plumages of Bullock's Orioles and Red-winged Blackbirds were memorable sightings, along with some very vocal and assertive Canada Geese! Photos by Pat Bates 




Phainopepla Club Awards —by Diana Keeney



Don't forget to submit your Year Report (July 2012-June 2013) from eBird to diana.keeney@sfvaudubon.org by June 20.

Swallow (50 species), Finch (100), Vireo (150), Avocet (200), **Phainopepla Club!** (250)

Here's how to create a Year Report:

1. Log your sightings at www.eBird.org
2. Create a report by the following path:
 - a. Select **Explore Data** tab
 - b. Under **Summary Tables** at bottom right of page, select **My Observations**
 - c. Create a **Year Report** to start on **July 1, 2012**
 - d. Select the **LA County locations** of your sightings
 - e. Print or download the report showing the **Date and Total # of Species**
3. Send report to Diana Keeney at SFVAS, PO Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409 or e-mail to diana.keeney@sfvaudubon.org.
4. Reports received by June 20 will be acknowledged at the General Membership Meeting (Pot Luck) on June 27, 2013 

Birdathon Results and Information



Below are the results of the 2013 Birdathon events. The pledges are still coming in, so the amount of money raised and acknowledgment of donors will be in the next edition.

A big "Thank You" to all our Birdathon leaders. We had a wide range of events this year that included several of the regular monthly bird walks, several traveling caravans covering many miles over wide geographic areas, a 24-hour birding marathon, and a 2-hour sit-in at a single location. The participants ranged in age from 8-80!

The Birdathon leaders exemplified the best in good natured competition and the donors gave generously to support the education and conservation efforts of SFVAS. Donations can be sent to SFVAS, PO Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409 or made Online at www.sfvaudubon.org (click Annual Birdathon, Donate).

| Date | Event Location/Name | Leader | Expected Species Count | Actual Species Count! |
|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| April 16 | O'Melveny Park | Carolyn Oppenheimer | 35-40 | 33 |
| April 20 | Angeles Crest Highway Loop | Karen Johnson | 50 | 52 |
| April 21 | Malibu Creek State Park | Art Langton | 50 | 58 |
| April 21 | Lori Willis Memorial Fund | John & Andrew Willis | 75 | 55 |
| April 24 | Antelope Valley | Jim Moore | 120 | 131 |
| April 27 | Morongo Valley | Dick Barth | 65-70 | 73 |
| April 27-28 | Greater LA Area | Allan & Muriel Kotin | 100 | 105 |
| April 28 | Highway 33 | Art Langton | 70 | 73 |
| May 3 | Santa Susana Mts. Simi Hills | Mark Osokow | 65-70 | 70 |
| May 5 | Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve | Kris Ohlenkamp | 65-70 | 56 |
| May 10 | The Big Sit | Linda Jones | 30 | 39 |
| May 11 | Children's Birdathon | Diana Keeney | 30 | Varied by child |

The "Big Sit" Birdathon -Reported by Linda Jones, Photo by Betty Rose

On May 10, 2013 a "Big Sit" Birdathon was held by 13 birders. We stayed within the first observation station south of the entrance gate at Sepulveda Wildlife Preserve, sitting most of the time. Although appearing sedentary, we were hard at work spotting and identifying birds. Out of a projected 30 species, 39 were spotted. Among the exciting sightings were Cedar Waxwings which are seen here only occasionally. Also fun to watch was the Osprey that landed on the Osprey tower with a large fish. He continued his brunch for the entire time we were there. Red-winged Blackbird males were everywhere gurgling their *konk-la-reee* call and showing off their brilliant red epaulettes. The drab females strolled nonchalantly around looking over the field of suitors. One American White Pelican was present, somewhat past its time to migrate back to the breeding grounds in the interior West. Birdathon participants enjoyed the experience; some left early and some came late, but all had fun. 🐦



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Langton Family Birdathon -by Art Langton

My nephew Ryan and I were the team for the Langton Family, and we birded the area from Ventura Harbor up Highway 33 to the Cayama Valley April 28. We got off to a slow start as McGrath State Park is flooded and underwater so no admittance. The estuary of the Santa Clara River is just one big lake with no mud flats or wading birds. Apparently the winter rains and storms weren't sufficient to break through the berm/sandbar and allow the river to empty into the sea. This gave us time to bird Foster Park, and La Cañada Larga road which were good for a few species each. The best birding for us was in Wheeler Gorge which was good for nearly a third of our count and included Hermit, Yellow-rump, and Townsend's Warblers, and Olive-sided and Ash-throated Flycatchers plus several Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, three species of woodpeckers, and a Bullock's Oriole, Steller's Jay. Ojai Meadows provided a pair of nesting Kestrels, many vultures and a pair of Cinnamon Teal. Rose Valley Lakes were nearly dry and nearly devoid of birds with the exception of a Yellow Warbler. Middle Lions Creek was very low and crossed easily, but very few birds as compared with prior years, mostly Townsend's and Wilson's Warblers. We continued on over to Ozema station to try to reach or exceed the seventy mark and in doing so added Valley Quail, a swift and meadowlark to our list. For what we got, we worked very hard.

Ventura Harbor was quiet except for a few willets and whimbrels on the beaches and rafts of Western Grebes offshore. Cormorants and pelicans on the rocks added two more species. No, we didn't see anything too noteworthy. We had hoped at the beginning of the day to perhaps pick up a condor, Golden Eagle, or Prairie Falcon, all of which have been seen in the area in the past. Maybe next year. 🐦

Calendar of Events

June

Saturday, June 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, June 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@sfaudubon.org or (747) 444-9683.

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

Saturday, June 8. Monthly Field Trip to Rancho Sierra Vista Preserve (Second Saturday) 7:30 a.m. We expect to see Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, orioles, flycatchers, raptors, possibly Grasshopper Sparrow. Directions: Take the Ventura Freeway (101) to the Lynn Road exit in Thousand Oaks. Go south on Lynn Road and proceed 5.3 miles to Via Goleta. Turn left at Via Goleta to the preserve entrance. The main gate officially opens at 8:00 a.m. but a ranger usually opens it much earlier. We will meet at the gate at 7:30, ready to drive down to the parking lot and get an early start. We will bird until about 11:30. Leader: Richard Barth, (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, June 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.

Saturday, June 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, June 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, June 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@sfaudubon.org.

Monday, June 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, June 27. SFVAS General Membership Meeting, Annual Pot Luck, and Photo Show. 7:00 p.m. Location: 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.

The evening's program will include the installation of new officers for the 2013–2014 year. It will also feature presentations from our own talented photographer members sharing their best photos. All are invited to participate. Limit the number of images to 15 or less. Presenters must narrate. Possibilities are birds, nature, vacations, field trips, or backyard natural wonders.

Don't miss this always-enjoyable annual get-together of friends, food, and photos as our activity year draws to a close. For more information see "Monthly Program", page one.

July

Saturday, July 6. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–12:00 a.m. See June 1 for details.

Sunday, July 7. Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m. See June 2 for details.

Saturday, July 13. Placerita Canyon Nature Center Docents' Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m. See June 8 for details.

Tuesday, July 16. O'Melveny Weekday Walk at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 9:00 a.m. See June 18 for details.

Saturday, July 20. Monthly Field Trip: Mt. Pinos. 7:30 a.m. Join us for summer montane species such as Fox Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, Dusky Flycatcher, Cassin's Finch, Hairy Woodpecker and Clark's Nutcracker. Meet in the parking lot at Iris Meadows. Bring plenty of water, sunscreen, insect repellent and lunch. Directions: From the San Fernando Valley, take I-5 north to the Frazier Park exit. Go west through Frazier Park and continue for about 20 miles up Mount Pinos Road to

the end (and parking lot.) Your vehicle must exhibit a National Forest "Adventure Pass" or Golden Age Passport in order for you to park and bird in this area. Leader: Richard Barth, (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, July 20. Santa Monica Mts. Conservancy Bird Walk at Towsley Canyon. 8:00–10:00 a.m. See June 15 for details.

Sunday, July 21. Malibu Creek State Park Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m. See June 16 for more details.

NO GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS IN JULY AND AUGUST. Enjoy your summer and see you in September!

**Future Field Trips (details later):
August 17. Chilao and Buckhorn
September 21. Huntington Central Park and Bolsa Chica**

Phainopepla Photo of the Month by Lynda Elkin



This month's photo comes from SFVAS member Lynda Elkin of Sherman Oaks. She shot this white-throated sparrow at Descanso Gardens using a Nikon D3200 with a Nikkor 200 zoom lens. Here's what Lynda says about her photo: "On my third search through the Rose Garden, I spotted this shy bird foraging on the ground with a group of white-crowned sparrows. I waited 40 minutes before having a clear shot. Well worth the wait." We think so, too, Lynda!

Please submit your photos to Lynn.Maddox@sfaudubon.org. Only one picture per photographer per month please! Ideally, the picture will be

taken within our area and the information will include the location and the date it was taken, what camera and lens was used, a short account of how the picture was taken, and profile of the photographer. Good shooting! Thanks, Lynn. 🐦

Introduction to Bird Sounds Workshop

Sylvia Gallagher will be offering an Introductory Bird Sounds Workshop on Saturday, October 5 for SFVAS. Sylvia is a well-known for her expertise in teaching birding identification by sight and sound. Her workshop will introduce the practice of using sonograms to better understand and analyze bird calls and songs. Her classes have produced many outstanding birders in the southern California area. Sylvia lives in Huntington Beach so we are fortunate to have her come to the valley for a day. More details about her workshop will be available in the next issue of the *Phainopepla*. If you are interested in taking this workshop or want more information, save the date, and contact Heather Medvitz. This date will not conflict with the Beginning Birder's Class dates. heather.medvitz@sfaudubon.org. 🐦

Beginning Birders Class

Due to great demand, we are planning to hold another Beginning Birders Class in October. The format will be similar to the one we had earlier in the year; two Thursday evening sessions at Wild Wings Store, two special bird walks with our wonderful leaders, and encouragement to attend our October General Meeting and to participate in the Beginners' Bird Walk for the general public for October. The price again will be \$25 and the number of participants will be kept to eight. There will be more information in the next copy of the *Phainopepla*, but if you wish to reserve yourself a space, let Rose Leibowitz know at SFVAudubonSociety@gmail.com. 🐦

THE SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY (ROCKETDYNE):

WHAT SFVAS IS DOING THERE AND WHY? *by Mark Osokow*

For approximately the past three years, representatives of SFVAS have been quietly, but actively, involved in the effort to assure a thorough, but environmentally friendly, clean-up at the former Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL, known somewhat erroneously as Rocketdyne). A part of the site, located in the Simi Hills in Ventura County just west of Chatsworth, is administered by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). This area was the site of rocket engine testing that contributed to most of the major accomplishments in the U. S. space exploration program, including the development of the Space Shuttle main engine, as well as our missile defense shield. Other portions of the site, leased by the U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) from the Boeing Company and predecessors, hosted major facilities for nuclear power generation research and development. A variety of other advanced technology programs, many defense-related, also took place on the site.

The unfortunate byproduct of these laudable efforts was contamination of the soil, surface and groundwater of the site with chemical and radiological substances, most notably trichloroethylene, perchlorates, dioxins, and cesium-137 compared with relatively undisturbed sites in nearby areas of Ventura County. While the site has many areas that are considered clearly contaminated, the overall extent and severity of contamination varies greatly across the site, and most areas have trivial levels of contamination or none at all. This has been determined by extensive testing and data analysis by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), which currently has regulatory authority over the site.


Nevertheless, in spite of a lack of clear evidence, claims that pollution on or from the site has contributed to serious illnesses, including cancer, abound. There has been much exaggeration and exploitation of the facts about the contamination by certain local politicians, their supporters, certain advocacy groups, and media publicists. At the same time, these interest groups, along with individuals believing their illnesses can be attributed to pollution from the site, are promoting an approach to clean-up of the soils to the "background" levels of the undisturbed sites. This approach threatens to destroy existing, intact, uncontaminated wildlife habitat while creating additional problems that will threaten public health and the quality of life in the western San

Fernando Valley that far exceed any potential benefit of cleaning up the site to the background standard.

Nuclear research programs at SSFL ended in the 1980s! Rocket engine testing was winding down by the 1980s, with the last tests performed in 2006. With the ending of these operations, the area has been undergoing major demolition and clean-up activities for more than twenty years in some cases. However, much remains to be done.

SFVAS will continue to aggressively monitor the situation and attempt to assure that the forces of exaggeration and exploitation do not bring about unnecessary destruction of the environment in their zeal to protect the public health from real or imagined threats. At the same time, SFVAS is partnering with other organizations and individuals to promote a long-term vision of conservation of the property as a wildlife sanctuary and historical park. SFVAS has already been monitoring and characterizing bird life at the site via the society's San Fernando Valley Bird Observatory for two years. To that end, the Observatory, with the Boeing Company facilitating, established its first field station at SSFL. The Observatory is currently engaged in characterizing the bird life via systematic counting protocols and bird banding.

Much useful data has already been obtained. This data can demonstrate the nature, function, role, and importance of the site to bird life surrounding the San Fernando Valley, while highlighting the wisdom of preserving the area for future generations of people, as well as for birds and other wildlife. In addition, the Observatory will be there to assist in detecting possible impacts, if any, to bird life from the remaining contaminants. To date, 118 species of birds have been found on the site. Thousands of birds have been systematically counted using point count and other protocols. While the bird banding program is in its infancy, more than 300 birds have been captured and evaluated. No evidence of any adverse impact from pollutants has been observed; however, we will continue to monitor the bird life and take whatever actions we can to promote our long-term vision for the site.

Additional articles about SSFL will be forthcoming in this newsletter. For more information in the meantime, please contact San Fernando Valley Bird Observatory Chairman, Mark Osokow. 

Monthly Field Trip Reports *by Richard Barth*

Our Morro Bay Weekend took place on March 16–17. A number of us started our birding a day early to make this a three day event. We enjoyed outstanding weather and tallied 107 species for the trip.

Target birds Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pigeon Guillemot, Brant and Peregrine Falcon were readily found, although Brant has experienced a noticeable decline in wintering numbers here in recent years. Common Goldeneye, Surf Scoter, Northern Pintail and Blue-winged Teal were featured among the many waterfowl species. All three cormorants were present as were Red-throated and Common Loons. Black Oystercatcher, Black Turnstone, American Avocet and Long-billed Curlew are always favorites on our shorebird list here. The expected gulls were on hand and we were treated to an adult Glaucous-winged and an adult Herring. Other selected species of interest found: Horned Grebe, Clark's Grebe, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Forster's Tern, White Pelican, Belted Kingfisher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, California Thrasher, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Wilson's Warbler (heard only), Townsend's Warbler, Pine Siskin, Purple Finch and Wren. Among the sparrows seen were Savannah, Lincoln's and Fox, with Golden-crowneds offering an especially good study.

April 27 marked our journey to the Morongo Valley area and Black Rock Campground in Joshua Tree NP. The trip doubled as a SFVAS Birdathon event and we welcomed sightings by our participants from anytime during the weekend in the desert including from Whitewater Preserve.

We were successful in tallying some special birds like White-winged Dove, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, Vermilion Flycatcher, Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin, Summer Tanager, Greater Roadrunner, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated Sparrow and Scott's Oriole. We heard Yellow-breasted Chat and saw most of our other favorites including Black-chinned Hummingbird, Cactus Wren, Western Wood-Pewee, California Thrasher, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Western Bluebird, Spotted Towhee, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Lawrence's Goldfinch (seen obscured on nest only), Hooded Oriole and Bullock's Oriole. Also notable were Yellow Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Phainopepla, Chipping Sparrow and Pine Siskin. Somewhat unexpected was Mountain Chickadee, as was Ring-necked Duck. We struck out on empid flycatchers for the first time in memory on this trip. Our total count for the event was seventy-three. 🐦

Audubon-at-Home *by Alan Pollack, Photo: House Finch nest, April 2013, by R LeVine*

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. 🐦



If you wish to be notified when the *Phainopepla* is Online, please e-mail us at sfvaudubonsociety@gmail.com. 🐦

2013 Audubon Convention / July 12-15
Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, Washington

For more information and to receive e-mail updates visit www.audubon.org/2013convention.

IN MEMORIAM

Stuart D. Wells

1948 – 2013

After a long battle with cancer preceded by a prolonged effort to overcome injuries caused by a fall, long time member and former officer, Stuart Wells passed away in mid-April.

Stuart was a most enthusiastic birder, a disciple of the late Arnold Small and Herb Clarke. Stuart enrolled in more than one of their UCLA extension classes on bird identification because he enjoyed their field trips and used birding to relieve the stresses of the business world. He was a frequent participant in Chapter field trips as well as ABA conventions and tours and was usually in attendance at any of the local identification workshops conducted by Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett. He is probably best remembered for his participation with the Chatsworth Nature Preserve walks and Christmas Bird Counts which he led, co-led, or participated in up to the time of his confinement following his fall.

The Chatsworth tours with Stuart were always interesting in one way or another. One rainy morning of a wet spring rocks seemed to be jumping out of the gravel in the road in front of the car as he and I drove along. Perplexed by this sight, Stuart braved the rain, got out the car, captured one of these jumping rocks only to discover they were really small western toads taking advantage of the wet weather to leave the seasonal ponds of their birth and migrate to new territories. While hundreds of toads must have been squashed by the car, this was but a small fraction of the tens of thousands present and established the Preserve as the major toad nursery in the west Valley.

Other discoveries in the Preserve included the “thirty” bird tree, a Brant during the last El Nino year far from its normal migratory route, and a nesting pair of Say’s Phoebes at a time in which they were considered to be only winter residents of the Los Angeles Basin confined to breeding only in the Antelope Valley. Once Stuart thought he had discovered an owl in a Woodland Hills pet shop. The owl turned out to be a Common Poorwill, a good find under any circumstances. Perhaps the bird had been attracted into the shop by the sounds

of chirping crickets for sale. The bird was captured and released into a more suitable habitat.

Stuart was a Vice-president of the Chapter for two terms, an early birdathon chairman, and a principal negotiator in the sale of the Holm’s estate. He was a graduate of UCLA with a degree in anthropology. He later earned a JD but never practiced law intending to use his law degree as preparation for a career in real estate. Instead, he managed his own computer company for twenty years developing software, and repairing computer hardware. He spent time on the board of directors of the Southwest Herpetologists Society where he became a close friend of Jarron Lucas, utility operator of the Encino Reservoir. Through this connection and relationship, a breeding pair of Long-eared Owls were located and correctly identified as occupying the reservoir property. The birds became regular and reliable entries on the Chapter’s Christmas bird counts and past Americas Birdiest County counts. He, and son Aaron, also spent time going on and enjoying digs and field trips with the paleontologists of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

Not only was Stuart a great lover of wild creatures and the outdoors, he encouraged similar interests in the young being a supporter of the junior herpers of the Southwest Herpetologists Society field programs both within Chatsworth Preserve and throughout Southern California. Son, Aaron, started out as a birder, became a herpetologist, and was the presenter at the Chapter’s October 2012 membership meeting with a program on the reptiles of southeastern Arizona. Always generous with practical advice, Stuart was a great conversationalist, a valued birding companion, always a gentleman, and fun to be with. The Chapter extends its sympathy to Aaron and Sharon and all of the Wells family. —By Art Langton





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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.

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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

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Membership SFVAS is pleased to welcome the following new members. We hope you will get involved with our many field trips and activities. Please contact Rose Leibowitz, Membership Chair, with any questions at rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org.

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- Patrick Hickey
- National:**
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- Deborah Ambrosino
- Cindy Anderson
- Anil Anthony
- Bridget & Jerry Arce
- Thomas Bakke
- Shula Baron
- John Barrett
- Rory Bestle
- Betsy Birdsall
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- Trudy Zuckerbrow

