



Phainopepla

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October / November 2013

Monthly Program

SFVAS General Membership Meeting
Thursday, October 24, 2013, 7:00 p.m.
Encino Community Center

Speaker: David Bell, Ph.D.

**Topic: eBird: For Beginning and
Advanced Users**

In 2002, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society launched eBird. Participation has grown rapidly and a rich data base is being acquired, giving us information on bird abundance, migration patterns, changes in bird populations and more. This data allows eBird to become the bellwether to warn scientists about dramatic drops in a population of a species, for example. This data helps lead to awareness about habitat loss or other environmental risks allowing for more proactive responses.

David will show beginning users of eBird how it works and how to get started. He will also be able to demonstrate some of the more advanced uses of the data available to eBird users. David is President of BIRDS IN THE HAND, a maker of birding apps that work with eBird and he will give a brief introduction to these as well.

David Bell, Ph.D., is a life-long birder who was born and raised in Pasadena, CA. He has spent his career running businesses devoted to improving the environment. His most fun project was helping to found the Reva Electric Car Company in India, which is now among the largest electric vehicle manufacturers in the world. Dave believes that eBird is critical to capturing biodiversity data now for driving good conservation decisions over the next decades.

You are invited to the
San Fernando Valley Audubon Society
Conservation Awards Banquet
Honoring: Louis Sahagun
Guest Speaker: Rosi Dagit

Friday, November 8, 2013
6:00 Raffle and Silent Auction
7:00 pm Dinner is served
"Encino Glen" 16821 Burbank Blvd.
Encino, CA 91436

If you would like to receive an invitation to this event please e-mail ann.ohlenkamp@sfvaudubon.org and an invitation, response card, and return envelope for your check, will be mailed to you.

The cost is \$50.00 including tax and tip.

New!! Or pay Online via PayPal at our Website: www.SFVAudubon.org. The button can be found on the Home Page and the Conservation News and Events (light green button on the right side of the Home Page.) You will not receive a confirmation of your reservation. Reservations will be held at the door. For further questions call Ann Ohlenkamp, at (747) 444-9683.

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 4–5, for directions.

2013 Conservation Awards Banquet

Friday, November 8, 2013, 6:00 p.m.

"Encino Glen" 16821 Burbank Blvd.

Encino, CA 91436

Conservation Award Recipient:

Louis Sahagun, LA Times Reporter



This year our Conservation Award recipient is Louis Sahagun, an L.A. Times reporter who has been writing about environmental issues throughout California. He covers issues ranging from religion, culture, the environment, crime, politics, and water. He was on the team of L.A. Times writers that earned the

Pulitzer Prize in Public Service for a series on Latinos in Southern California and he is a [CCNMA: Latino Journalists of California](#) board member, and author of the book, "[Master of the Mysteries: The Life of Manly Palmer Hall.](#)"

Over the past 15 years Louis Sahagun has written hundreds of articles dealing with every aspect of Southern California's natural environment and the eastern Sierra Nevada. He chronicled efforts to restore a 62-mile-long stretch of the Lower Owens River left dry by the Los Angeles Aqueduct, and was the first journalist to kayak down the Los Angeles River—a technically illegal trip recorded on video. He has written extensively about white-nose fungus devastating bat populations, and chytrid fungus wiping out frogs. A year ago, he showed how the East Fork of the San Gabriel River gets trashed by weekenders. He broke news about a failed tree planting effort by the U.S. Forest Service in the San Gabriel Mountains following the Station Fire. Elsewhere, he showed how and why marine life is returning to the Port of Los Angeles. His recent work includes in-depth critical looks at the negative impacts of alternative energy projects on Native American burial grounds, migrating birds, desert tortoises and California Condors. Then there was an arduous trek through federal and private lands to prove that an oak tree discovered in a remote canyon in the San Bernardino Mountains is indeed the largest in the world.

It is because of Louis's insightful coverage of the Sepulveda Basin South Wildlife Area's devastation that a bright light was shown on this loss of wildlife habitat. Due to his articles in the Los Angeles Times many shareholders are aware of the destruction and we feel that those articles helped bring the Army Corps of Engineers to the table to talk about restoration of the area.

Guest Speaker: Rosi Dagit, Senior Conservation Biologist, Resource Conservation District-Santa Monica Mountains and Senior Research Associate, Oceanites Antarctic Site Inventory

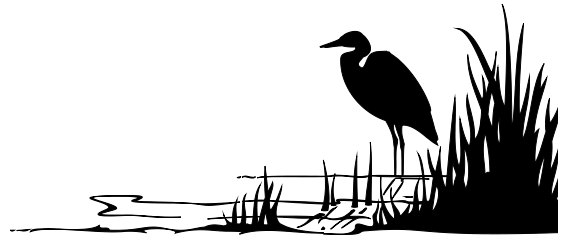
TOPIC: PENGUINS IN OUR WATERSHED? Adventures in Antarctica and the Santa Monica Mountains

What do Antarctica and the Santa Monica Mountains have in common? Both locations are home to numerous sensitive species living in amazing and challenging environments. Since 1994, Rosi Dagit has been studying the population abundance and distribution of penguins and flying seabirds in the Antarctic Peninsula. For over 20 years, she has also been studying the function of watersheds in the Santa Monica Mountains, tracking population abundance and distribution of endangered southern steelhead trout, tidewater gobies, southwestern pond turtles, various frogs, bats, and bugs, as well as the oak woodlands that are the vegetative lynchpin supporting all these interesting animals.

Spend time enjoying stories from the field, both far and near. Using similar monitoring and tracking methods, the similarities and differences between these two geographic hot spots provide insights into the impacts of climate change on both a local and global scale. From tent camping on an island in Antarctica, to all night fish trapping in the rain on Topanga Creek, Ms. Dagit's adventures and willingness to be cold and wet for extended periods of time have produced data that helps us understand how environmental changes are impacting both Antarctic and local wildlife.

Rosi Dagit has been a researcher with Oceanites and the Antarctic Site Inventory since its inception in 1994 and a Senior Conservation Biologist with the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains since 1988. Rosi began her career in marine biology in 1976 training dolphins and working on boats in the Florida Keys. Since then, she has worked on a variety of research projects in wonderful parts of the world from the Galapagos to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. When not in Antarctica, Rosi is currently conducting research on frogs, steelhead trout, pond turtles, and oak trees in the Santa Monica Mountains. She has written numerous scientific articles on these subjects and is the author of *GRANDMOTHER OAK* (Roberts Rinehart Press, 1996), a children's book about a very special oak tree growing in Topanga State Park. Rosi lives in Topanga, CA with her husband Chris Denny, and their son Sean, and numerous four-footed friends.

Second Saturday Bird Walks For Families and Beginners



9:00—11:00 a.m.

October through March

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve (FREE)

San Fernando Valley Audubon will lead bird walks for families and beginners on second Saturdays, October 2013—March 2014.

(Saturdays: Oct. 12, Nov. 9, Dec. 14, Jan. 11, Feb. 8, and Mar. 8.)

Stroll through the lovely Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve with a guide, enjoying its trails and wildlife lake. Many birds come here in winter. Learn about the birds and why they come here.

These Walks are for:

- Families with school-age children
- People trying their first bird walk
- Beginning birdwatchers

Time and Meeting Place: The Wildlife Area entrance and amphitheater are in the southeast part of Woodley Park. Meet at the amphitheater at 9:00 AM.

Directions: Turn north from Burbank Blvd. onto Woodley Ave., which is $\frac{1}{2}$ mile west of the San Diego Freeway (I-405). Travel about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the second possible right turn and turn east (right) at the sign for the Wildlife Reserve. Bear right at the fork in the road and go east $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the Wildlife Area parking. Walk south past the monumental rocks and restroom building to the amphitheater.

Equipment and Clothing: Wear sturdy shoes and layered clothing. A cap or hat with a brim is suggested. We have binoculars to loan or you can use your own.

More Information: Muriel Kotin at 310.457-5796, Diana Keeney at 818.998-3216 or visit San Fernando Valley Audubon's website www.sfvaudubon.org.

Reservations are not needed except for large groups. **Rain cancels.** 🌧

Calendar of Events

October

Saturday, October 5. 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, October 6. 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, October 12. Season Opener! 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, are resuming 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, October 12. 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.

Tuesday, October 15. 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.

Saturday, October 19. Monthly Field Trip to El Dorado Park in Long Beach. 8:00 a.m. Directions: Take the 405 Freeway to the Studebaker Road exit in Long Beach. Go north on Studebaker to Spring Street, then turn east (right) on Spring to the park entrance. The parking fee is \$7. Meet in the Nature Center parking lot. Leader: Richard Barth (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, October 19. 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, October 20. 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.

Thursday, October 24. 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. **TOPIC: eBird: For Beginning and Advanced Users. PRESENTER: David Bell, PhD.** For more information see Monthly Program, page one.

November

Saturday, November 2. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–12:00 a.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, November 3. 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.

Friday, November 8. SFVAS Conservation Awards Banquet. 6:00 p.m. Join us as we honor **Conservation Award recipient, Louis Shagun**, L.A. Times Reporter, along with **Guest Speaker, Rosi Dagit**. Location: "Encino Glen"

16821 Burbank Blvd., Encino, CA 91436. **Make your reservations today!** See pages 1—2 for more information.

Saturday, November 9. Beginners and Family Bird Walk. 9:00–11:00 a.m. 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, November 9. 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, November 16. Monthly Field Trip: Ventura Harbor and Water Treatment Ponds. 8:00 a.m. Directions: From the San Fernando Valley, take the 101 Freeway to the city of Ventura, exit Seaward Avenue, turn left over the freeway, then immediately left (south) on Harbor Blvd. to Spinnaker Drive and proceed to the end. Look for birders in the last parking lot on the left. Leader: Richard Barth, (310) 276-0342.

Saturday, November 16. 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, November 17. 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, November 19. 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, November 25. SFVAS Board Meeting. 7:00 p.m. Balboa Mission Town Hall, 16916 San Fernando Mission Blvd., at Balboa (southeast corner) in Granada Hills.

Thursday, November 28. NO SFVAS General Membership Meeting. Due to the Annual Conservation Award Dinner and Thanksgiving we will **NOT** have a General Membership Meeting in November. **See you in December!**

Future Field Trips (details later):

No Monthly Field Trip in December due to the Christmas Bird Count

January 18. Upper Newport Bay and San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary 🐦

Phainopepla Photo of the Month by Alexander Viduetsky



Our photo for this issue is from Alexander Viduetsky. He used a Canon 7D camera and a Canon 100-400 mm L telephoto lens to capture this European Starling on February 9, 2013, at Lake Balboa. Here's what Alexander said about the shot: "This bird was foraging on the ground...among numerous Lark and White-crowned Sparrows and House Finches. Lake Balboa is one of my favorite places to watch birds because of the proximity of Van Nuys and Burbank airports that allows me to watch the airplanes as a bonus to the birds."

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 🐦

A RESPONSE TO DOUG SMITH'S COLUMN ON THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

[Angelenos' vision of their river is created from a made-up memory](#), From the August 16, 2013, issue of the [Los Angeles Times](#)

"Historically, the river has been dry for most of the year. Now, it flows continually, but most of the water in the channel is industrial and residential discharge."

"...an upstart retired Navy captain named Donald C. Tillman, proposed...— building a water treatment plant behind Sepulveda Dam.

After much delay, the plant opened in 1985.... Thus was born the L.A. River that modern-day enthusiasts say they want to restore.

For years, a lobby of environmentalists, urban dreamers and poets has been pushing for removal of as much concrete as possible and creation of parkways to make an urban amenity of the vast, and most of the time, empty spaces of the river.

They're careful not to overplay the "restoration" angle, but they have a tough time finding the right words to describe a natural phenomenon that couldn't actually exist in nature.

Like Hollywood, the Los Angeles River is part of invented L.A. There is nothing to restore; nothing to rehabilitate or renew."

I finished Doug Smith's August 16, 2013, column on the Los Angeles River and its water sources with some dismay and sorrow that Mr. Smith and his editors would permit an article with multiple geographic and historical misconceptions to be published.

In 1941, my family moved to Studio City and lived within two blocks of the Tujunga Avenue bridge across the Los Angeles River. As World War II was on and gasoline and other commodities rationed, many a recreational hour was spent in and along the river. Far from being a scummy trickle filled with broken glass and sewage, it was a location to wade, splash, and cool off on warm summer days. The river with its fast flowing current supported a vibrant ecosystem of fish, crayfish, herons, egrets, snakes, and lizards. The fish we called "guppies." What they really were, no one knew. This was all long before the mushrooming development and population growth of the Valley following the conclusion of the war or the building of the Tillman Water Treatment Plant.


If Mr. Smith will reread his history books, he will recall that the original Spanish settlers established the pueblo which became Los Angeles because of the

presence of permanent, reliable, year around water sources, the Los Angeles River and its several tributaries. Rather than denigrate the river, one must remember no river, no pueblo, no city, and, undoubtedly, no Owens Valley aqueduct.

As with all streams and rivers with a classic dendritic drainage pattern, the Los Angeles River has many sources, the Tillman Water Treatment plant being one the latest among many. These others would include springs and seeps around the Valley, most bulldozed to destruction, as well as tributaries originating in the San Gabriel Mountains. To say that the Los Angeles River starts at the junction of Bell Creek and Arroyo Calabasas is the same as saying the Ohio River begins at Pittsburgh, PA. The river name may start there, but the water does not. It flows from still farther upstream. Geographic names simply supply labels for human convenience.

One of the Los Angeles River's minor tributaries runs year around within a couple of blocks from where I live. Also nearby, at the intersection of Royer and Runnymede in West Hills, is a permanent spring which oozes water upward throughout the year creating a continuous pothole which the Department of Street Maintenance has futilely, over the last thirty years, tried to repair. Even the mightiest of rivers are formed from the confluence of many minor trickles and seeps

The change from a source of potable water to an open sewer resulted from political, engineering and land use planning decisions on the part of City government. In the 1950s housing builders and developers were permitted to install cesspools where no sewer yet existed. These occasionally overflowed, much to the annoyance of neighbors, into the Los Angeles River via the storm drain system

No, the Los Angeles River will never be returned to what it once was despite the wishful thinking of those too young to remember the way it was prior to the replacement of riparian habitat with sterile concrete. These images live on only in the memories and photo albums of those of us old enough to have explored and experienced the river and all it had to offer prior to channelization. Yes, it can be made more attractive to people and wildlife, but the old river is gone for good and in some places, a mile downstream from Vineland Avenue, doesn't even occupy its original channel, bed, or route. —Arthur Langton 

Audubon-at-Home by Alan Pollack

Back by popular demand (his own!) Alan is re-running his series of articles on wildlife friendly gardening. He welcomes new readers and any questions his articles provoke.

Restoring Habitat, One Yard at a Time

It was a beautiful spring day in 1995. I had recently retired and was enjoying my volunteer work at Habitat for Humanity. On this particular day, I was relaxing on my backyard patio, gazing at the expanse of lawn and surrounding shrubbery, all meticulously manicured except for an old, dead almond tree which had fallen over in a storm the previous winter and I had not gotten around to removing. I began to think—I'm helping to build homes for people, but what about habitat for wildlife? *If I was a bird or butterfly, would I want to even visit this yard, much less live here?* Is there food for birds and other critters? Except for some old walnut trees that provided nuts for the squirrels, the answer was "no." Is there water for drinking and bathing? No. Is there shelter to protect them from the weather and from predators? Very little. Are there places for them to raise their young? Again the answer was, very little. And I realized something else—our backyard was very boring!


I began to visualize what a habitat for wildlife would look like in our yard. It had separate "rooms" that were not visible until you got there on paths of natural material that led from room to room. It had dense foliage—tall trees, tall and short shrubs, ground cover, rock piles and brush piles that provided shelter and places for critters to raise their young. It had plants that provided food in the form of seeds, nuts, berries and nectar. And it had a variety of water sources, some running and some still. I drew up a plan based on my vision and, over the next couple years, I had transformed our yard. Most of the lawn was gone (it had very little value for wildlife and consumed an enormous amount of energy and resources caring for it), replaced by all of the things I had visualized on that spring day. I added a dry stream bed, which not only added interest and sheltering rocks, but also collected rainwater and solved a drainage problem. The bug-ridden, fallen almond tree remained, providing food for woodpeckers and some other, larger dead trunks were left on some trees that provided cavities for nesting sites.

Flushed with a feeling of success, I turned my attention to our front yard. There was a very large patch of Algerian ivy as well as more lawn that I replaced with wildlife attracting shrubs, trees, perennials, and vines. My wife's beloved rose bushes remained, but no longer required pesticides because the birds that flock to our garden eat the aphids. I also began using plants that were native to our region because they require very little water once established and no food, in contrast to non-natives. In addition, native plants are more attractive to native wildlife (obviously!).

Our garden now looks very different than most of our neighbors' gardens. It no longer looks meticulous. It requires much less maintenance and much less water and other resources. Most of

the leaves that fall remain on the ground where they serve as mulch and hide bugs for insect-eating birds. Our old asphalt driveway has been replaced by the same material I used for the garden paths—decomposed granite. And best of all, our more natural garden has attracted 51 species of birds (to date), five species of butterflies, lizards, beneficial insects, the occasional possum and raccoon, in addition to the squirrels, and one curious coyote.

Fast forward to 2013. I have been volunteering with Wildlife Care of Ventura County for about 16 years now; I have had my yard certified by the National Wildlife Federation as an "Official Backyard Wildlife Habitat Site" and am volunteering as a wildlife habitat steward for that organization and as the Audubon-at-Home Chair for the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, helping others transform their yards into spaces that are attractive to both humans AND wildlife.

As I wander through our garden now, I think that it is not only a habitat for wildlife, but that it, too, is a habitat for humanity, for what would my life be like if earth's wild and beautiful creatures were not a part of it?—Alan Pollack, M.D. 


Dear Alan:


I am looking at my disappearing grass and the appearing dirt. I am really not interested in having grass, but I still like to have a "mat" to walk on so I do not carry in all the dirt....Years ago I had my backyard designed and was very happy and still am with the design. My quest is now to rid the garden of grass and install something water-wise and sustainable....I do have three grandchildren, who come to visit, so it cannot be cacti....Would you have any ideas? I also noticed The Dept of Water and Power would like to help out.

My response:

Yes, LADWP is offering a subsidy of \$2.00/sq ft to remove lawn and replace it with less thirsty alternatives (while the funds last). (Check out LADWP's Website for more information, [LADWP California Friendly Landscape Incentive Program](#).)

There are quite a few non-thirsty ground covers that can replace lawn. But if you want a flat, green, walkable surface that requires no feeding, and just an occasional mowing and watering, you can plant yarrow, or its cousin, wooly yarrow. When mowed, these California natives do not develop their flower stalks and their lacy leaves lie flat on the ground. They prefer sun or partial shade and are adaptable to many soils.

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@sfaudubon.org. 

We now have **490** people who get notified by e-mail when the *Phainopepla* comes out, **110** of them have opted to only receive it online and save us the paper and postage. **272** people are following us on Facebook. If you wish to be notified when the *Phainopepla* is online, please e-mail us at sfvaudubonsociety@gmail.com. 

What is the Focus of Audubon?

Dear Readers,

It has been a long time—12 years—since I last attended a SFV Audubon meeting. I did enjoy them and their programs and the camaraderie that came with them. Here in Joshua we are far from an Audubon chapter, so I continue to choose to be an affiliate of your chapter and receive the *Phainopepla* and read the names of members that I rubbed shoulders with in the late 80s and 90s.

The purpose of this article is to solicit your opinions—those of you who wish to respond—about Audubon priorities, what Audubon symbolizes, which components it stands for or should stand for.

In 1973 I took my sixth graders to a camp in the San Gabriel Mountains. The experience was euphoric. The school board would give me permission to take my class and one or two others during the following years. In order to be better informed I wanted to learn all I could. A friend of mine, quite knowledgeable in the natural sciences, urged me to attend an Audubon summer camp. I responded negatively, told her that although I loved nature, I wasn't interested in bird watching. She said, "Rich, Audubon is not about birds per se, but all of nature." I renegeed and attended what was then the Audubon camp for adults in Wisconsin.

I was astounded. My friend was so right. Every day we attended walks with naturalists with different strengths: a geologist, a botanist, a meteorologist, a zoologist, and yes, one who took us out and taught us how to use binoculars so we could see and identify birds. For my nature project I made an elaborate sundial.

And so the Conejo Valley Unified School District outdoor program grew in a fashion that I modeled after what I learned that summer and the following summer at the Audubon Camp of the West in Wyoming. Our outdoor school students learned about solar ovens, native plants, stream flow and subsequent conservation, mammal tracking, and how to identify constellations at night. Many of them got an orientation to bird identification. (The program I founded is now in its 40th year.)

Today, retired from teaching, I am an impassioned birder. It is one of my greatest strengths among the natural sciences. I notice that Audubon chapter guest speakers and newsletter, and the contents of Audubon magazine give greatest emphasis to birding and bird conservation. I have no qualms about it, only curiosity; after all, John James Audubon was virtually all about birds. My question is, should other areas of the natural sciences receive greater emphasis than they do? Should there be more content and enthusiasm applied to reptiles, endangered plants, global warming and insects to better balance that of ornithology and birding? What is your opinion? Please send your thoughts to the *Phainopepla* editor at rebecca.levine@sfvaudubon.org, and a subsequent issue with your sentiments might be expressed therein.

Naturalistically,

Rich Gerston 

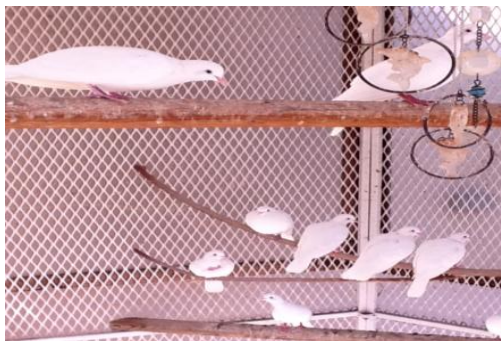
Monthly Field Trip Reports *by Richard Barth*

The first of our two summer montane trips was to Mt. Pinos on July 20. We birded mainly at the 8300—8600 ft. level. White-headed Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee, “Thick-billed” Fox Sparrow, Dusky Flycatcher and Cassin’s Finch were among the favorites observed. This is breeding season for virtually every species on the mountain, and Judy Matsuoka’s discovery of a Dusky Flycatcher nest low in a bush with four begging nestlings was one of the highlights of the day. We had good luck seeing Brown Creeper, Chipping Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Steller’s Jay, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pygmy Nuthatch and House Wren. Western Wood-Pewee is always a good find. We tallied Mountain Quail along the road on the drive up. We’ve made Townsend’s Solitaire a target bird here, and this trip we had a brief look at one individual in flight. Western Bluebirds were abundant. Other species on hand were Violet-green Swallow, American Robin, Northern Flicker, “Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco and Cooper’s Hawk. Clark’s Nutcracker was missed.

On August 17 we birded along Angeles Crest Highway in the San Gabriel Mountains, visiting the Chilao area and Buckhorn Flat. A pleasant surprise this year was the sighting of two Red Crossbills, one of which offered great views. Red-breasted Sapsucker, Black-chinned Sparrow and Lazuli Bunting were also special tallies for our list. We sometimes have difficulty locating Hairy Woodpecker on this trip, but had great luck this time. The warbler contingent was strong—featuring MacGillivray’s, Nashville, Hermit, Black-throated Gray, Yellow-rumped, Wilson’s and Orange-crowned. Many of the expected species like Brown Creeper, Green-tailed Towhee, White-headed Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, Steller’s Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Oak Titmouse, Western Bluebird, Western Wood-Pewee and Pacific-slope Flycatcher were well seen. Western Tanager was present. We couldn’t find Clark’s Nutcracker, Dusky Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Band-tailed Pigeon, “Thick-billed” Fox Sparrow, Purple Finch and Cassin’s Finch. 🐦

Love Doves

Looking to find good home(s) for most of our white Love Doves. Many people do not understand that ONLY white PIGEONS are able to survive on their own or have 'homing' ability. These are NOT releasable! Also many people seem 'stuck' on having more exotic birds; however, the white doves are wonderful, gentle pets to enjoy in a private collection for their gentle and soothing sounds. In a healthy environment they remain healthy.



There are 18 doves and some of these birds are mated, but there are more males who can be a pet or are looking for a girlfriend. Some are pictured here.

I am in North Hills West in the SFV and would be grateful to chat and maybe share solutions. I can be contacted by e-mail: think4pcg@verizon.net. —Paulette 🐦

SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL DONATES \$2,000 TO SBEEP

SFVAS is happy to announce that the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council has provided SFVAS with \$2,000 to help with our Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program (SBEEP). SBEEP provides 2,000 LAUSD school children field trips to the Sepulveda Basin North Wildlife Preserve (the only remaining Wildlife Area in the Sepulveda Basin). SBEEP fieldtrips make the lessons learned in the classroom real. The children actually see food webs, the effects of environmental pollution, and the beauty of a working ecosystem in a natural setting. SFVAS needed help to maintain its commitment of funding 30 fieldtrips per year.

Community support like that of the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council is very valuable to SFVAS and we thank them. —Submitted by Ann Ohlenkamp 🐦

RAPTORS: Let's Start with Vultures

by Heather Medvitz

This article is the first in a series about raptor groupings. Taxonomic groupings change along with new research which includes DNA updates as well as other scientific information. For purposes of this series, I will follow the taxonomic order used in the Sixth Edition of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

Generally, raptors are birds of prey. These mostly meat-eating birds may eat mammals the size of cattle or deer in the case of carrion-eating raptors while others may eat bobcats and smaller mammals, insects including moths, crickets, dragonflies, centipedes, lizards and other reptiles, amphibians and fish as well as other birds. All raptors have a hooked bill to facilitate tearing food apart and most have strong, sharply curved claws for seizing prey.

The family *Cathartidae* includes, in the southwest, the Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*, the Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus* and the California Condor, *Gymnogyps californianus*. Unlike other raptors, these birds have unfeathered heads and eat carrion. Their diet gives us a clue as to the reason they have unfeathered heads. Vultures are able to drop their body temperature at night to conserve energy. Upon waking they shiver and quickly regain their day temperature, often fully spreading their wings in the sun, possibly for thermoregulation (keeping their body temperature within its needed range), drying off, disinfecting their plumage, or possibly to detect slight changes in air currents that facilitate soaring.



Turkey Vultures have a well-developed sense of smell. This helps them locate hidden carrion, although they prefer fresh food. Black Vultures have a less keen sense of smell

and must rely on vision to spot food. They will often congregate with or near Turkey Vultures to gain the advantage of their ability to find food. Young nesting Turkey Vultures will sometimes regurgitate putrid food when alarmed to scare off potential predators.

Since vultures eat high on the food chain, they are more at risk from environmental pollutants, and in fact they can serve as a bellwether to warn us about toxins we may not be aware of. In the past, a number of raptors were endangered because of DDT in the environment. Their egg shells became so thin they were unable to produce young. Currently, Assembly Bill 711 in the California legislature regarding the use of lead would require the use of lead-free ammunition for the taking of mammals, game birds, nongame birds, and nongame mammals. It would prevent lead poisoning in carrion eating birds and reduce the high levels of lead found in individuals who eat wildlife shot with ammunition containing lead. National Audubon and California Audubon Chapters are actively

promoting passage of this bill which can prevent death in the California Condor and other carrion-eating birds.

Distinguishing Turkey Vultures from other raptors in flight is aided by their pattern of holding their wings above horizontal in a strong dihedral (V-shape). In addition their wing tips are upraised with tips spread away from one another. Other raptors do not show this combination of distinctive features. The Turkey Vulture has a two-toned under wing with whitish flight feathers that contrast with its blackish under wing coverts (the part of the wing just below the leading edge or top of the wing). The juvenile looks similar in flight except for a black head and beak. The legs of the Turkey Vulture extend halfway down the long tail in flight.

The Black Vulture adult is iridescent black overall except for whitish outer primaries on both the upper and lower sides of the wings. It has a shorter tail and broader, shorter wings than the Turkey Vulture. In flight, its legs reach almost to the tip of the tail. The tail is square but may look rounded with pointed corners when fully fanned. The Black Vulture soars without teetering and the wings are almost straight out to the sides, unlike the Turkey Vulture. There has been a Black Vulture sighting accepted in California in 2013 and two accepted sightings in 2012 in the Santa Barbara and Ventura County areas. It is believed to have been the same bird both years. Otherwise, the bird is seen in parts of southern Arizona and Texas.



In flight, the California Condor holds its wings out straight and the adult bird has white wing linings that stand out clearly below the dark shoulder border when seen from

the underside of the wings. From above, the wings show white tips on the greater coverts and white edges on the secondaries. The wingspan is 109 inches, making the bird unmistakable in flight. The adult has an orange head and the juvenile a gray head.

The California Condor has been brought back from near extinction through captive breeding programs. Its numbers have dropped severely primarily due to lead poisoning and illegal hunting. The California Condor is still classified as endangered and is carefully monitored by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. There is still a captive breeding population and Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex has a carefully monitored program.



Look for more about raptors in our next newsletter. We will look at Ospreys and Eagles next, followed by a later article on Accipiters and Kites. (Turkey Vulture photo by Heather Medvitz. California Condor photos by Loi Nguyen, Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, 9/7/13)





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Save a tree! I DO NOT wish to receive a hardcopy of the *Phainopepla*; I'll get my news online.

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.

An introductory membership to the National Audubon Society is \$20 and should be sent separately to:

National Audubon Society
Membership Data Center
P.O. Box 422250
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Be sure to write "C1ZC120Z" on the form to assure assignment to our chapter. 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

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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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