

# Phainopepla



Published by the

**San Fernando Valley Audubon Society**

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society



December 2009 Volume 60 No. 10

## PROGRAM NOTES

**David Weeshoff to speak at Thursday, December 3, SFVAS**

**General Membership Meeting. 7:00 p.m.**



**Topic: Svalbard-Land of Polar Bears, Walruses, and Birds**

Svalbard is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of mainland Europe, about midway between mainland Norway and the North Pole. The archipelago is the northernmost part of Norway. Dave will present us with a photographic journey of his trip to the Arctic complete with fascinating descriptions and anecdotes of a land seldom seen.

Please see the Calendar for directions. ♪

**IMPORTANT!** Please NOTE: Due to the Christmas holiday our normal meeting schedule has been changed. The December General Membership meeting will take place on Thursday, December 3, 7:00 p.m. There will be no meeting on December 24.

## **Antelope Valley Field Report** by Linda Edwards

It was a clear, crispy morning, the AM of Halloween. Perfect for some Fall Birding. But first, Bob had to struggle with a Piute Pond's gate glitch; an unmanageable tangle of heavy-duty chains that soon became insurmountable! Sooooo we headed up the road, through the maze of construction apparatus, and out onto the roads that frame the Sewage Treatment Ponds.

While to many, this may not sound like a particularly inviting location, for our purposes it tends to be ideal. During our time there, we were able to identify 19 species, some in considerable abundance. There was also a soothing effect from the reflections given off by our surrounding mountains!

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San Fernando Valley Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 7769  
Van Nuys, CA 91409

29 Sep 2009

Dear board members of SFVAS,

Earlier this year you generously gave me a full scholarship to attend a camp for young birders by Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) called Camp Cascades. I am pleased to report that the camp was an incredible and educational experience for me, and am delighted that I had the opportunity to attend, thanks to SFVAS. Besides seeing eight life birds, I also learned much about the breeding biology of many birds I'd seen primarily away from their nesting grounds, such as Rhinoceros Auklets, Glaucous-winged and 'Olympic' Gulls, Swainson's Hawks, Vaux's Swifts, and Hammond's and Gray Flycatchers; I also gained first-hand experience with the geographic variation of birds I had seen before, including American Three-toed and Hairy Woodpeckers, Gray Jays, Pine Grosbeaks, and Crossbills. Our leaders, Barry Lyon, Louise Zemaitis, and Victor Emanuel himself, are incredibly knowledgeable and severely helped me enhance my birding skills.

Of course, looking for and thoroughly studying birds wasn't the only object of this camp. Louise and a few other campers shared my passion for studying butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. The display of hill-topping butterflies, including Indra and Old World Swallowtails, Clodius and Rocky Mountain Parnassians, Pink-edged Sulphurs, Mariposa Coppers, many blues and fritillaries, and Melissa Arctics, to name a few. Victor taught me just about everything I know about plants and the ecology of the Pacific Northwest. While I've visited some similar old growth forests before, I now have whole new levels of appreciation for their complex diversity of plant life. Barry and some of the campers had an amazing library of knowledge of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, and the regions we spent time in were fantastic for studying these. In an environment such as this, it would have felt challenging not to learn.

While I spend most of my free time watching and studying birds and nature, it isn't everyday that I can go on outings with other teenagers who share this passion. Spending nearly two weeks with twelve other such kids was invigorating and encouraging. Many of them are startlingly sharp birders, and I sincerely enjoy being a part of this strange and small sub-subculture.

Camp Cascades was more than just another birding vacation. It gave me a greater understanding of the magnificent state of Washington, and helped me become a better-rounded naturalist. Camp Cascades also reaffirmed my desire to eventually have a career involving ornithology. If SFVAS would like a talk or a program on this camp, I would be very happy to do this. All in all, I think of Camp Cascades as one of the most crucial experiences in my life, and I'm thankful that SFVAS provided me with the funding to be there.



Thankfully yours,

John Garrett

Photo: Gray Jay, by Rebecca LeVine, 2008



## 2009 Christmas Bird Count Information

### Saturday, December 26, 2009

In place of the Chapter's usual monthly field trip, the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society will once again join chapters across the country and take part in National Audubon's 110th annual Christmas Bird Count. The count is part of the world's largest cooperative wildlife survey with over 50,000 participants in North and Central America, Hawaii, and Caribbean. Count totals are forwarded to and analyzed by interested researchers in cooperation with the NAS and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

The bird count provides a measure of the nation's early winter bird populations including species composition, distribution, and population trends. Bird count numbers are often the only long-term, comprehensive information available regarding local wintering bird populations. As this chapter's count enters its second half century, some trends are clearly evident. While the skill level of the counters and field guides continue to improve the numbers of some of the most common birds continues to decline. Still others have disappeared from count totals while some others are relative newcomers to the count area.

Members and friends of the chapter are encouraged to save the date and join one of the count groups listed below as numbers of participants are crucial to the success of the count. The more eyes in the field, the more birds are seen. Several of our count areas are underserved and can use additional help. Extensive birding experience is not necessary, only a willingness to come out and count wind, rain, or shine.

Those unable to join one of the count groups may assist by noting species and numbers of birds at backyard feeders, parks, and neighborhoods provided these counts take place within a 7.5 mile distance from the count center at the intersection of Nordhoff and Balboa. Please report such counts along with time spent observing to the compiler by letter, phone, or e-mail (Art.Langton@SFVAudubon.org) no later than and preferably before January 4, 2010.

While count participation is free and open to all, a \$5/person donation to offset the chapter's payment to NAS will be greatly appreciated and accepted.

**Hansen Dam and Vicinity Meeting Time: 7:00 a.m.**

From the intersection of Osborne and Glenoaks go north on Osborne to Dronfield, turn right on Dronfield and enter the park. Proceed downhill to a large parking lot. Look for counters with binoculars. Bring lunch, drink. Leader: Jim Hardesty

**Bee Canyon and O'Melveny Park**

**Meeting Time: 12 noon**

From the intersection of Balboa and Rinaldi, go north on Balboa to Sesnon. Turn left (west) on Sesnon and continue .5 miles. Park is on the right. Meet in the parking lot. Leader: Ron Melin

**Sepulveda Wildlife Area Meeting Time: 7:30 a.m.**

Meet at the parking lot east of Woodley Avenue and north of Burbank Blvd., south of the Tillman Water Treatment Plant. Bring lunch, drink. Leader: Kris Ohlenkamp

**LA Pierce College Meeting Time: 8:00 a.m.**

Enter the campus from Winnetka Avenue and meet by the flagpole in front of the Administration Building. Bring drink, snacks. This large area needs several counters. Leader: Brenda Pfaff

**Limekiln and Aliso Canyons, Porter Valley Country Club**

**Meeting Time: 8:00 a.m.**

Meet at Limekiln Canyon. Park on the north side of Rinaldi about one block west of Tampa. This area was heavily impacted by the Sesnon fire but may still be worth a look. Leaders: Carolyn Oppenheimer and Donna Timlin

**Veteran's Park, El Cariso Park, Pacoima Wash,**

**Wilson Canyon**

**Meeting time: 7:30 a.m.**

From the Foothill Freeway (I-210) exit north onto Hubbard Street. The park is on the right just past Eldridge Avenue and Mission College. Turn right into the third park entrance and meet in the parking lot at the end. Bring snacks, lunch, and drink. Leader: Jim Moore

**Chatsworth Nature Preserve**

For information regarding the meeting location and time of possible counting activities in this location, phone the compiler (Art Langton), during the week prior to count day, at (818) 887-0973. ✕

Additional locations, times, and leaders as well as changes and modifications may be announced at the December 3 membership meeting. Art Langton, compiler



# Calendar of Events

**Tuesday, December 1. Antelope Valley Audubon Committee will hold its Quarterly Meeting and 2nd Annual Holiday Potluck. 6:00 p.m.** The Prime Desert Woodland Preserve in the Elyze Clifford Interpretive Center, at 43201 35th Street W., in Lancaster. Bring a food item to share and join in the festivities as Pam Stones explains the Annual Christmas Bird Count and how we might participate locally. Also enjoy a DVD titled "Watching Sparrows" which explores the lives and breeding habits of 46 species. We are looking forward to a strong turnout! Contact Bob or Bonnie Weatherman (661) 269-2051 for more information.

**Thursday, December 3. 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. Come early for social hour. Our speaker will be Dave Weeshoff who will speak on: Svalbard: Land of Polar Bears Walruses and Birds. See "Program Notes" on page 1.

**Saturday, December 5. Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Bird Walk. 8:00–11:00 a.m.** Directions: Exit the Ventura Freeway (U.S. 101) at Las Virgenes Canyon Road and proceed north to the trailhead parking area at the end of the road. Please bring plenty of water and wear proper shoes. No toilets are available on site. Leader: Jim Hardesty (818) 346-6712, jim.hardesty@sfaudubon.org.

**Saturday, December 5. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–10:00 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 of LA Co Parks at (661) 257-4050.

**Sunday, December 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. For more information contact him at (818) 986-7785 or kris.ohlenkamp@sfaudubon.org.

**Saturday, December 12. Beginners and Family Bird Walk. 9:00–11:00 a.m.** Come on out for a fun bird walk at Sepulveda Basin! The White Pelicans are starting to return why don't you? 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 Linda Jones, (818) 831-6061. Reservations are not needed except for large groups. Rain Cancels. Please visit our Website [www.sfaudubon.org](http://www.sfaudubon.org).

**Saturday, December 12. Placerita Canyon Nature Center Docents' Bird Walk. 9:00 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. Leader: Bob Fischer. For more information, call the Nature Center at (661) 259-7721.

**Sunday, December 13. Descanso Gardens Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** Meet at the first wide place after entering the gardens. Admission is free for early birders. Located at 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada. Leader: Karen Johnson or Nancy Herron Knode. For more information, contact Karen at [karen.johnson@sfaudubon.org](mailto:karen.johnson@sfaudubon.org) or (818) 790-1687.

**Tuesday, December 15. 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, with any questions (before 7 p.m.) or [carolyn.oppenheimer@sfaudubon.org](mailto:carolyn.oppenheimer@sfaudubon.org).

**Saturday, December 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) 255-3606.





**Sunday, December 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, [muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org](mailto:muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org) and/or Art Langton, (818) 887-0973.

**Thursday, December 24.**  
No General Membership Meeting.

**Saturday, December 26.** San Fernando Valley Annual Christmas Bird Count.

**Monday, December 28—Thursday, December 31.** Bosque del Apache—Special Field Trip. Join me on my annual winter pilgrimage to my favorite birding spot. We'll spend two days at Bosque, meeting at 6:30 a.m. both mornings to take in the magnificent lift-off of snow geese and a continuous train of thousands of Sandhill Cranes. After the morning spectacle, we'll bird the refuge with the goal of finding 75 species. We'll also spend one day birding the Manzano Mountain area in search of Pinyon Jays and all three species of bluebirds, plus a trip to the Sandia Crest in search of all three species of Rosy Finches. Contact Jim Moore, [jim.moore@sfvaudubon.org](mailto:jim.moore@sfvaudubon.org), if you would like to join me. Bring your camera.

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## Monthly Field Trip Report

by Richard Barth

This year's field trip to El Dorado Park in Long Beach took place on October 17.

We had hoped to see two rarities that were reported in the park a couple of days earlier, Magnolia Warbler and Tropical Kingbird, but neither could be refound on our walk. A Plumbeous Vireo ranked as our number one highlight for the day, and there was interest in a couple of late-ish Western Kingbirds and a Bullock's Oriole. We had a White-breasted Nuthatch, not often seen here.

Other species of some note were Ring-necked Duck, Common Moorhen, Spotted Sandpiper, Black-necked

**Saturday, January 2. Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Bird Walk. 8:00–11:00 a.m.** See December 5 for details.

**Saturday, January 2. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–10:00 a.m.** See December 5 for details.

**Sunday, January 3. Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** See December 6 for details.

**Saturday, January 9. High Desert Bird Prowl. 8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.** Here is an opportunity to seek out wintering hawks, owls, Mountain Plovers, Mountain Bluebirds, long-spurs, sparrows, etc. Directions: Take the 405 or 5 Freeway north to the 14 Freeway. Exit the 14 at Avenue S south of Palmdale and drive to the Park-n-Ride Lot just east of the off-ramp. We will meet at the west end of the lot and carpool for the morning. Bring snacks and beverages. Scopes and FRS radios will be helpful. We will return to the meeting spot about 1:00 p.m. No fee, no reservation. Leaders: Jim Hardesty, (818) 346-6712, and Jim Moore, (661) 298-1130.

**Future Field Trips: (Details later)**

**January 16. Upper Newport Bay and San Joaquin**

**Wildlife Sanctuary**

**February 20. Private Game Preserve**

**in Ventura County** †

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Stilt, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, Western Bluebird and Chipping Sparrow. Our warbler contingent consisted of Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped and Common Yellowthroat. A few Brown Pelicans passed overhead, wandering inland. Downy Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Western Scrub-Jay, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Spotted Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Say's Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird, Western Meadowlark and Nutmeg Mannikin were on hand, as well as both Lesser and American Goldfinches. We saw Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks plus American Kestrel, Osprey and Turkey Vulture. The expected five species of herons were present. †

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## Audubon-at-Home Mailbox

 by Alan Pollack

In this now and then column, Alan Pollack, our Audubon-at-Home Chair, will answer your questions about gardening for wildlife and sustainable gardening practices. Please e-mail him with any questions you have regarding creating a wildlife-friendly garden that can be used for publication. Alan also 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](mailto:alan.pollack@sfvaudubon.org). †



## What's That Bird Doing? Explore Bird Behavior with New Online Course

Students develop new skills with e-learning offering from Cornell

Ithaca, NY—Why does a Red-winged Blackbird flare its colorful wing patches? What does it mean when ducks bob their heads? Is the way a bird arranges its feathers significant?

Answering these questions gets to the heart of bird behavior, which is all about sex and survival. Anyone can explore fascinating patterns of bird behavior in a new five-week online course from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The goal of “Investigating Behavior: Courtship and Rivalry in Birds” is to help people learn how to observe and interpret some of the ways birds are communicating with their behavior. Some of those behaviors are literally a matter of life and death.

“It’s not your typical text-heavy, lecture-based tutorial,” said course instructor and content coauthor Colleen McLinn. “It’s packed with multimedia and interactive activities that make this course unlike anything else available. We wanted to create a learning environment that’s friendly and accessible to everyone.” Course multimedia content comes from the Cornell Lab’s Macaulay Library, the largest archive of animal sounds in the world, with a growing video collection.

“Courtship and Rivalry in Birds” explores a basic principle of bird behavior each week, featuring common and exotic species. From Florida Scrub-Jay families in which siblings help raise new chicks, to the jaw-dropping plumages and bizarre dances of the birds-of-paradise, the goal is to help students develop new skills in observing birds and be able to apply what they’ve learned anywhere.

“With this new online course, we want to share our passion for birds and nature in a new way,” said John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “We want anyone who is curious about nature to come along as we explore the fascinating, beautiful, and continually surprising world of birds!”

The online course was developed in partnership with eCornell, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cornell University. For more information about the course and to register for the five-week session beginning January 6, 2010, visit [www.ecornell.com/birds](http://www.ecornell.com/birds)--be sure to watch the video with more about the course contents. The cost of the course is \$295 (\$255 for Cornell Lab members) with a \$30 dollar registration fee.

To receive the Cornell Lab member discount, sign up by phone at (866) 326-7635.

Contact: Pat Leonard, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, (607) 254-2137, [pel27@cornell.edu](mailto:pel27@cornell.edu)

Red-winged Blackbird photo by Ted Schroeder

© Cornell Lab of Ornithology The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a membership institution dedicated to interpreting and conserving the earth’s biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds. Visit the Cornell Lab’s web site at <http://www.birds.cornell.edu> ♪

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## Oh Those Peli’s by Remi Bresnan

Unlike the Brown Pelicans of ocean that do their majestic flights riding the updrafts of incoming waves and soaring high to the sky, dive bombing back into the water for a meal in which they hardly miss, the White Pelicans are fresh water bound. They don’t dive for their prey. They sit and sleep in the mudflats at the end of the lake—that way the coyotes can’t get to them because coyote’s boney little legs sink in the mire of it all. What’s really unique is that several of them paddle out in the lake at a time, make a circle then proceed to tighten it up, thereby herding fish to a shallow area and feast. Too bad they don’t know how to barbeque— I’d invite them over to my patio. ♪



**JOIN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON**  
**To get started with your membership,**  
 use the following form and mail to:  
 SFV Audubon Society  
 Attn: Membership  
 P.O. Box 7769  
 Van Nuys, CA 91409  
 Make all checks payable to SFV Audubon.

**SFVAS Membership**

Regular 1-yr Chapter Membership....\$20      \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Student 1-yr Chapter Membership....\$10      \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Optional First-Class Postage.....\$5      \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contributions to SFVAS.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Total.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_

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 How did you learn about SFVAS? \_\_\_\_\_

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

The PHAINOPEPLA, published ten times a year, is the newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409, 818-347-3205. 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 newspaper 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 52529, Boulder, CO 80322. Be sure to write "C12" 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](mailto:rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org).

**SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY**

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For Chapter leaders email addresses, see our web site:

[www.SFVAudubon.org](http://www.SFVAudubon.org)

**CHAPTER PHONE (818) 347-3205**

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# Phainopepla

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society  
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## Dated Material

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[www.sfvaudubon.org](http://www.sfvaudubon.org)

Phainopepla December 2009



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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](mailto:rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org).

Wayne Aller	John Clough	Ann Gosling	Ruzanna Melkonyan	Mel Sofian
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S. Calderon	Skip Flora	Ronald Lagerlof	Jon Rochester	
Jae Carver	Nancy Giacomi	Robin Little	Jacob K. Smith	

*Continued from page 1*

Foremost among our findings were the Northern Shovelers. Not only did they number well into the high hundreds, but many of them formed groups of 30 to 60 that were swimming around in what appeared to be feeding circles. A captivating sight! Other water birds included groups of Ruddy Ducks, and at least three gulls; California, Ring-billed, and Bonaparte's, some Eared Grebes, American Coots, American Pipits and Western Sandpipers.

In the surrounding trees and scrambling on the sand and dirt along the roadside we saw flocks of Horned Lark and the occasional House Finch, Savannah and White-crowned Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and the usual Common Ravens, European Starlings, and Brewers Blackbirds. A lone Greater Roadrunner paid us a running visit and a solitary Red-tailed Hawk stood watch from a pole in the distance.

All in all it was an excellent morning, one we look forward to repeating, when we can share it with you in person. ✦